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C I R C E

BY BABINGTON WHITE

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.



LONDON

WARD, LOCK, AND TYLER

WARWICK HOUSE, PATERNOSTER ROW

1867

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250. u. 320

LONDON:
ROBSON AND SON, GREAT NORTHERN PRINTING WORKS,
FANCRAE ROAD, N.W.

CONTENTS OF VOLUME II.

Act the Second.

QUEM DEUS VULT PERDERE, PRIUS DEMENTAT.

SCENE	PAGE
VI. MOCATTI TO THE RESCUE	7
VII. AT THE OPERA	22
VIII. OUT OF TOWN	34

Act the Third.

WRITTEN IN WATER.

I. A FINAL SITTING	51
II. TO THE DREGS	66
III. MADAME IS MEDITATIVE	91
IV. "CAN YOU SEE NOTHING THERE?"	109
V. WHISTLED DOWN THE WIND	135
VI. TARDY REPENTANCE	144
VII. IN THE CHURCHYARD	164
VIII. A BLANK	195
IX. SPELL-BOUND	213
X. A DISMISSAL	234
XI. THE END OF ALL THINGS	257

1. The first group of people who are affected by the disease are those who are in the first stage of the disease. This group is the largest and is made up of people who are in the first stage of the disease.

2. The second group of people who are affected by the disease are those who are in the second stage of the disease. This group is the second largest and is made up of people who are in the second stage of the disease.

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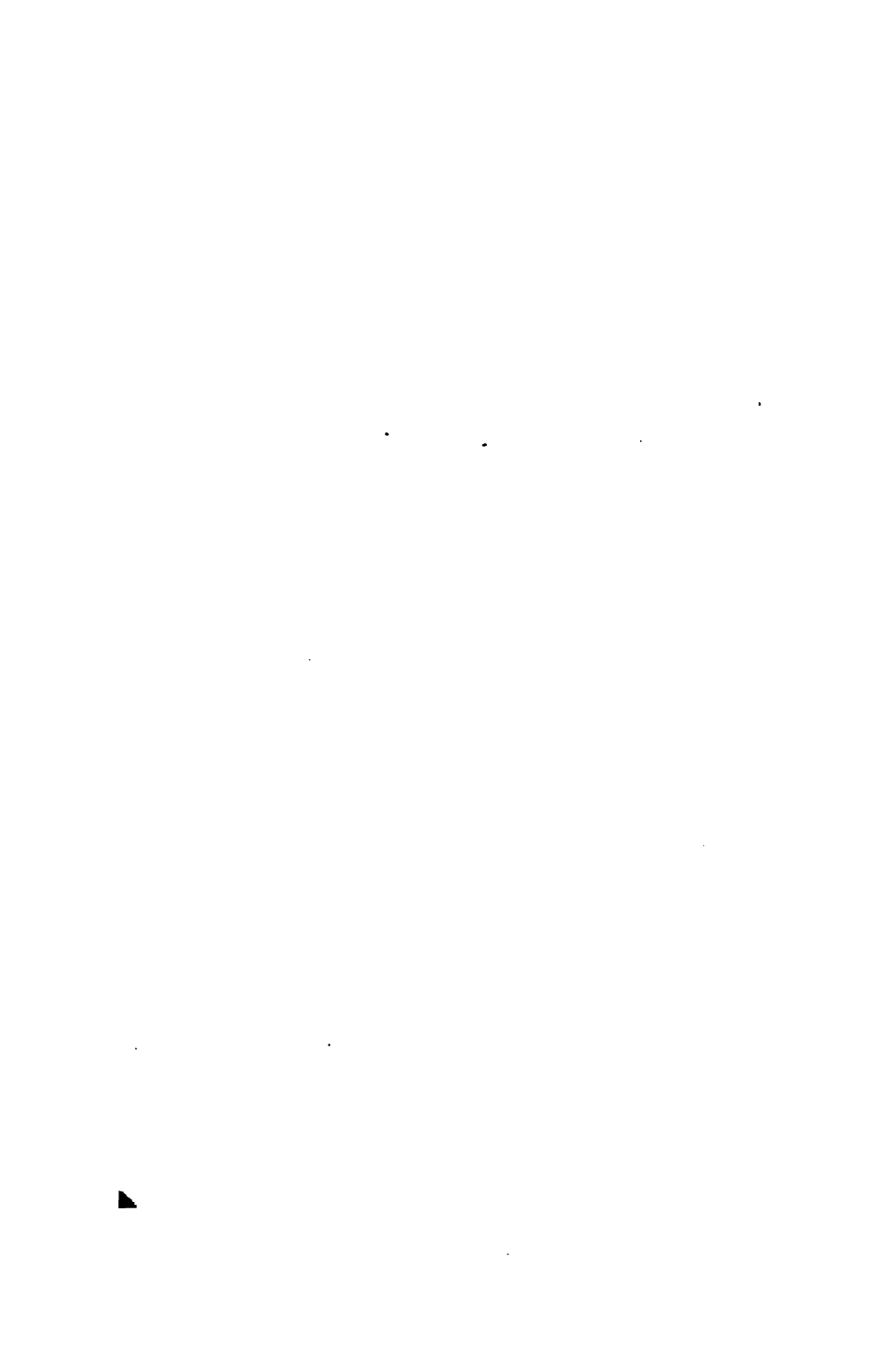
7. The seventh group of people who are affected by the disease are those who are in the seventh stage of the disease. This group is the seventh largest and is made up of people who are in the seventh stage of the disease.

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9. The ninth group of people who are affected by the disease are those who are in the ninth stage of the disease. This group is the ninth largest and is made up of people who are in the ninth stage of the disease.

ACT THE SECOND.

QUEM DEUS VULT PERDERE, PRIUS DEMENTAT.



SCENE THE SIXTH.

MOCATTI TO THE RESCUE.

"Amour, fléau du monde, exécration folie,
Toi qu'un lien si frêle à la volupté lie,
Quand par tant d'autres nœuds tu tiens à la douleur,
Si jamais, par les yeux d'une femme sans cœur,
Tu peux m'entrer au ventre et m'empoisonner l'âme,
Ainsi que d'une plaie on arrache une lame,
Plutôt que comme un lâche on me voie en souffrir,
Je t'en arracherai, quand j'en devrais mourir."

FROM the villa Mr. Mocatti went on a journey of exploration in the wide regions between Kensington and the extreme border-land of Notting-hill. At Notting-hill he found what he wanted—a spacious unfurnished drawing-room, with three long windows looking northward. The drawing-room was over a very large shop, which smelt of damp stucco, and which had been

taken by an enterprising young chemist, who was able to testify in a doleful spirit to the healthfulness of the neighbourhood. He was very glad to let his big drawing-room and a bed-chamber adjoining; Mr. Mocatti undertaking to send in furniture for both apartments from a neighbouring upholsterer in the course of the afternoon.

“Your tenant will sleep here to-night,” said the dealer when the bargain was concluded. “Have fires lighted in both the rooms, and be sure you keep them burning all day. The place smells damp and cold; and Mr. Bell is an invalid.”

The countenance of the apothecary brightened, and he looked involuntarily towards a choice brand of cod-liver-oil, two years in bottle. An invalid would require prescriptions made up, and if of a hypochondriac turn of mind might be

worth a small fortune to this despondent young chemist.

Mr. Mocatti selected his upholsterer, and gave his orders: for the bed-chamber, substantial comfort of the plainest description; for the painting-room an easy-chair, a Pembroke table, and a square of Dutch carpeting.

"I will reduce him to his primitive condition," thought the dealer; "I will starve him into greatness. He has been enervated by the atmosphere of that woman's house. I will give him a cold *douche* of poverty."

After having completed his arrangements, Mr. Mocatti hurried back to Adrian's Villa, where he made his way at once to the music-room. The doors of the easel were shut, and Laurence Bell was sitting in a listless attitude, looking dreamily across the lawn, where the shadows

of the cedars were dark and solemn as the shadows in a churchyard.

Mr. Mocatti stood in the doorway for some moments, looking at his protégé.

"Come, Laurence," he said at last, "rouse yourself, my friend. I am here to fetch you away."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I love thee too well to leave thee longer in the clutches of Giulia d'Aspramonte. Ah, thou dost not know how she is dangerous, that woman. She is like that fairy Melusine, wife of Count Raymond de Lusignan, *ange par la figure, serpent par le reste*. Come, my friend, I tell thee the air of this house is poisonous. You languish, you die, and you do not know it. I have found thee a studio which shall be thine own. I would rescue thee from thy Sybarite bondage. I would give thee once again thy liberty and thy genius. Come."

"Leave this place—leave her!" cried Laurence, aghast.

"But yes," exclaimed the dealer impatiently. "She no longer desires thy presence; she is beginning to be weary of thee and thy fancies. If thou hast independence of spirit, manhood, self-respect, it is time thou shouldst assert thyself."

"Leave this place!" reiterated the painter—"this room, which she has made so beautiful for me!"

"Which she has made so beautiful!" echoed the dealer contemptuously. "A few dozen yards of amber damask, and a little Wardour-street patchwork in the way of old oak furniture, made up from the dis-used lumber of forgotten Flemish churches! The copper stew-pans in her kitchen must have cost her more money. And now I look round, my friend, it seems to me that I miss some of those objects which beauti-

fied your apartment when I left England. Where is your Hercules and his bull; your *bonheur du jour* with the medallions in old Sèvres; your Etruscan candelabra; your Louis-Seize clock?"

Laurence Bell looked listlessly round the room, following the eyes of his patron.

"I did not miss them," he said carelessly; "I suppose they were removed before the Princess gave her concert."

"Take the hint, my Laurence. The work of *déménagement* has begun; it cannot finish too quickly."

"And my picture?" cried Laurence huskily.

"You will carry your picture to your new painting-room in a four-wheeled cab. *C'est de la prose, n'est-ce pas, après la poésie? mais c'est mieux que la tragédie.* Pack up your brushes, and come."

The painter laughed almost hysterically.

"You are dreaming, Mocatti," he said ;
"I cannot surrender this room until my picture is finished. I must have more sittings ; there are minute touches wanting yet. I have not yet achieved my great effect — the languorous splendour of the eyes. The eyes in my portrait are splendid, but they still want the dewy softness of life."

"My Laurence," murmured the dealer gravely, "your Princess will sit to you no more."

"But she has promised."

"She will break that promise, as she has broken many others. You and your art have made a very pleasant distraction for a summer season ; but there are many seasons in the life of Madame d'Aspramonte, and she requires fresh distractions. I thought that while her caprice lasted

you would do something great—inspired, fevered—*tant soit peu* maddened, perhaps, by her laudation. Unhappily you have outlived her caprice, and have done nothing.”

“You do not know ; it is not a caprice, it is—”

“What?”

“It is love. Yes, Mocatti, she loves me!” cried the painter passionately ; and then, ashamed of his avowal, he exclaimed, “Ah, why do you force me to betray myself—to betray *her*?”

There was infinite tenderness in the accentuation of those last words.

Antonio Mocatti smiled — a sardonic smile, but not unmingled with pity.

“My poor Laurence, do you really believe this?” he asked gravely.

“If I did not believe it I should go mad.”

“Then I have indeed reason to repent having brought you across the threshold of this house. Madame d’Aspramonte is incapable of loving you, or anyone else. There is a class of women created without heart or conscience, and she is of that class. She is a coquette *acharnée*. Do you remember what Ninon de l’Enclos said of Monsieur de Sévigné the younger? ‘His heart is a cucumber fried in snow;’ a comparison which savoured of the *bourbier* whence the demoiselle came. But, believe me, there are such hearts.”

“Stop, Mr. Mocatti; you have said quite enough. Another word and you may have said too much. I will not permit any slander of Madame d’Aspramonte.”

The voice in which the painter made this protest was hoarse and tremulous—the voice of a man in whom mental emotion struggles against physical weakness.

“My Laurence, we will forget Madame d’Aspramonte, and we will go to Rome and see the Vatican.”

The time had been when the very name of the Eternal City would have been sufficient to awaken sudden rapture in the heart of Laurence Bell ; but now the universe had narrowed itself into the one little spot on which Giulia d’Aspramonte happened to be standing.

“I cannot abandon this room until my picture is finished,” he said resolutely.

“But I have taken lodgings ; I have furnished a new painting-room for you.”

“I am sorry that you have wasted so much time and trouble ; but you had no right to make such arrangements without my knowledge. For the present I cannot conform to your wishes. I have lodgings in North Audley-street, and my painting-room is here.”

“And pray who is to go on paying for your North Audley-street lodgings?”

“You will not refuse to lend me a little more money, if I want it,” replied Laurence carelessly. “It will not be for long. I tell you I have a certain success in that picture.”

He pointed to the covered easel as he spoke. Mr. Mocatti looked at him despairingly.

“If I were to tell you all that I know of Giulia d’Aspramonte—” he said thoughtfully.

“I should believe nothing to her discredit,” Mr. Bell interposed with a threatening look. “Do not let us discuss this matter any further. I acknowledge no right of yours to question my actions. I owe you money, which I shall very soon be in a position to repay. And now I must wish you good-morning ; I am going back to town.”

"You are in a hurry."

"Yes ; it is past five, and I have to dine and dress."

"You have some engagement this evening ?"

"The Princess has offered me a seat in her box at Covent Garden."

"I fancy I remember hearing her talk of some *début* that is to take place to-night," replied the dealer meditatively ; "a Swedish tenor. How passionately she loves music, by the way, our Princess ! She attends all the *débuts* ; and to receive a bouquet from her is to be crowned by one of the Muses. And again, there is something peculiarly interesting in the idea of a Swedish tenor."

The face of Laurence Bell while Mr. Mocatti made these careless remarks would have been a fitting model for the study of a soul in purgatory.



“Does the Princess know this singer?” he asked with a gasp.

“Not yet. If he makes a hit to-night, she will perhaps permit him to appear at her next party. She is the patroness of newly-fledged genius, as you know by experience.”

“Yes,” answered Laurence with a sardonic smile; “she will tell him how she worships his art, how she believes in his genius; she will talk to him of his glorious future until his senses are intoxicated by her eloquence. She will sit by his side while he sings, looking at him with dark languid eyes that will blind him to all other lights on earth or in heaven. And then she will fritter away his time at flower-shows and morning concerts. She will send him to carry messages to her coach-builder and her florist; and when a year has gone by, and his art has made no pro-

gress, she will spare neither irony nor reproach until she has made him drink the cup of shame and disappointment to the very dregs."

"You know her so well, and yet remain to be her victim!"

"What have I said of her?" cried Laurence, passionate, inconsistent, ready in a moment to revoke every word of blame—"what have I said, except that she is a woman, with all a woman's unreasonable caprices; thoughtless, reckless, the creature of the hour, with the uncertain temper of a spoiled child; but still grand, noble, generous, unconscious of the wrongs she inflicts."

Mr. Mocatti was silent. Before this infatuation he felt himself helpless. He had loosened the flood-gates, and had no power to stop the torrent which his hand had set free.

“What shall I say to him?” he asked himself. “To what good shall I argue with him while he is under the spell? Would all the wise men of Greece have persuaded Titania to be reasonable about the weaver *à la tête d’âne*? Let things go; I can do nothing.”

Laurence Bell looked at his watch, and moved impatiently towards the door.

“I am coming,” said Mr. Mocatti; “my brougham is waiting. I have almost lamed my horses in your service, *ingrat*; and to what good? My man shall drive you to North Audley-street. I shall see you at the Opera, for I too am curious about this Swedish tenor.”

SCENE THE SEVENTH.

AT THE OPERA.

“ Quelle atmosphère étrange on respire autour d'elle !

Elle épuise, elle tue, et n'en est que plus belle.

Deux anges destructeurs marchent à son côté ;

Doux et cruels tous deux,—la mort,—la volupté.”

It was a grand night at Covent Garden, and the Princess d'Aspramonte was in her glory. Her box was on the pit-tier—roomy, luxurious, and close to the stage ; a box which demanded no fatigue in the mounting of stairs from the pilgrim who came to pay his homage to the insatiable divinity. The Princess delighted in first representations and *débuts*. To assist at the success or the failure of a new opera or a new singer was rapture to her. It was

excitement; and she only existed in the hope of finding new excitements. For the man who had written the opera, for the singer whose future was at stake, she was pitiless—ready to laugh with the loudest at a failure, or to applaud a triumph.

On these nights her beauty was always most brilliant. She caught the fever of an excited multitude, and of late her beauty had needed the glow of fever to conceal the ravages of time. Prosaic people had begun to repeat a dreary truism to the effect that Madame d'Aspramonte had once been younger. But on these nights she outshone all youthful beauties in the blaze of her meridian splendour.

"That woman is consuming her life by the violence of her temper," said one of her admirers. "You can see it in her face. *Elle est belle comme un incendie!*"

Laurence had taken his place in the

box before the arrival of his patroness. The opera had begun, but the painter was sitting in a corner with his back to the stage, meditating upon his own destiny in a moody attitude, when Madame d'Aspramonte entered, with Herr Frolich and a secretary of legation in attendance.

"Ah, Mr. Bell !" she cried ; " you have come to assist at the *début*."

Laurence started to his feet as if reanimated by the presence of his enchantress. He contrived to edge himself in between the young diplomate and the Roman lady, and to take up his post behind her chair. There was something in his manner to-night that was new to Madame d'Aspramonte—a certain air of self-assertion, a tone which seemed almost that of an accepted lover.

The opera was *Dinorah*. The new tenor appeared presently. He was a young

man with a girlish prettiness, a masculine *beauté du diable*. He sang his music with exquisite taste, and with a clear fresh young voice. But there was neither depth of feeling nor passion ; it was the effeminate softness of Guido rather than the rugged grandeur of Michael Angelo ; it was the bird-like carolling of thoughtless youth, not the eloquent melody of impassioned manhood.

Happily for the youthful Dalecarlian the cards in the grand game of Destiny had been packed for him by more cunning hands than his own. His success had been arranged in advance, and to-night the Princess had the satisfaction of presiding at a triumph.

She declared herself enchanted by the young man's performance, and leant forward on the velvet cushion to fling him her bouquet with her own fair hand, while

Laurence Bell stood by her side grinding his teeth in impotent rage—against her—against the singer—against himself—against all the world.

Herr Frolich watched the scene with a sardonic grin. “Shall I present the hero of the night?” he asked; “he will be only too proud to receive your compliments.”

“He must sing at my concert,” exclaimed the Princess; “his voice is delicious. No, you shall not bring him here to-night. I am tired, and I am going home immediately. Let me see—this is Saturday. You can bring him to me next Tuesday evening, and we will talk of the concert. Do you think he will sing for me?”

“He will sing for you—die for you, if you will, and make a swan-like end, fading in music,” answered the composer as he left the box.

Mr. Mocatti entered as Herr Frolich departed. One glance at Laurence Bell's face told him how the evening had sped.

"Well, madame," he said, "there has been a grand success, I hear."

"*Un triomphe éclatant !*" replied the Princess ; "Carlo Vitzi is a new Mario—a Swedish Reeves."

"And you have invited him to sing at your next concert?"

"Not yet ; but I shall certainly do so."

"*Ce pauvre Carlo Vitzi !*" muttered the dealer. "Come, Laurence Bell ; I am waiting to take you home."

He laid his hand heavily on the painter's shoulder ; but the touch did not awaken Laurence from the moody abstraction of mind into which he had sunk since the falling of the curtain.

"Come," cried Mocatti imperiously ; and the young man rose and obeyed him

with the unconscious manner of a sleep-walker. He left his Princess with a brief adieu. On other occasions he had attended her to her carriage, lingering on the curb-stone till the dashing little brougham drove away,—lingering in the hope of some last word or look. To-night he was under the influence of a passion which made him reckless of such random words or looks as had once been all-sufficient for his happiness. It was the monster Jealousy whose sharp tooth was gnawing at his entrails.

“Well,” cried Mr. Mocatti, when he and his protégé were seated in his carriage, “do you begin to understand your Princess? You have only been one amongst many. It is her own insatiable vanity, her own ambition, which has been fostered by your genius. It is not your glory she desired, but the honour of giving the world a new painter. You have disappointed her

hopes, and she turns to a new quarter for the gratification of her pride. She is to astonish the world as an amateur of music, and Carlo Vitzzi is to be the latest edition of Orpheus, father of songs."

"You knew her, and flung me across her path!" gasped Laurence.

"I did not know *you*. I wanted you to catch a spark of the Promethean fire, and you must needs plunge headlong into an abyss of flame. Ah, well, I suppose it is no more than the necessary ordeal. You were cold and tame. You wanted force—originality—the power that comes from suffering. You have suffered, and you will be great. Prometheus is the universal type of genius. It dares—it triumphs. The gods are envious and angry, and then there comes the little episode of the indefatigable vulture perpetually dining on an inexhaustible liver. If we would filch the

sacred fire of Olympus, *mon ami*, we must reconcile ourselves to the inconvenience of the vulture. Come, come, cheer thee, Laurence; achieve a triumph which shall make your Princess blush for her inconstancy."

"Inconstancy!" The word sounded like a reproach to the ears of Laurence Bell. What inconstancy could be baser than his—or so base?

"O, my youth!" he cried; "my honour, my happiness, my glory! she has trampled them beneath her feet."

"*Canaglia!*" muttered the dealer between his set teeth. "But we will show her that you can be great without her patronage."

"Yes, yes!"

"You will fetch your picture to-morrow, before she has left her room?" urged Mr. Mocatti.

“No, not to-morrow. I must have one more sitting, Mocatti.”

The dealer replied with a growl of execration.

“No,” remonstrated Laurence; “I am not the weak fool you fancy me. It is the picture I am thinking of, not the woman. One more sitting—one last long scrutiny of that proud passionate face, and I shall have stamped her beauty on the canvas in its noontide splendour. Let me finish my picture, Mocatti. If I possess that, I can laugh at her infidelity; for the triumph of my art will remain for ever—unchanging—immortal—”

“When the widow of Benjamin d’Aspramonte has gone to the dogs. She is more proud and wicked than the painted woman in the Bible, and it must surely end in the licking of her bones by the hungry curs of the city. Go no more to her house. She

is the enchantress of Homer, who changes men into strange creatures, and no friendly goddess has given thee the philtre that shall secure thee against her spells. Trust thyself no more across her threshold. *Cave canem*, says the motto on her door-step. Beware of her who is more dangerous than the lurking house-dog. For thy picture, I will fetch it, and mock myself to her nose if she tries to hinder me."

"I must have one more sitting, Mocatti," replied the painter doggedly; "my future is at stake."

"Bah! thou hast the fever. See, we are at your door. *Soyez sage, mon ami*. Go to bed and sleep, and let thy dreams be troubled by no shadows of Roman widows or Swedish singing men. Take thy rest, *poverino*. Next week we will turn over new leaves. We will go back to our innocence and our poverty, and our little

bits of *genre* for the milords of Manchester."

"Go back !" cried Laurence Bell bitterly. "No man can retrace his steps on the road I have taken."

SCENE THE EIGHTH.

OUT OF TOWN.

“S’il m’était donné de dire à quel supplice
Je voudrais condamner mon plus fier ennemi,
C’est toi, pâle souci d’une amour dédaignée !”

THE day after Signor Carlo Vitzi’s *début* was Sunday, and Mr. Mocatti being of a philosophical turn of mind, and not given to any idle superstition in the way of church-going, devoted his morning to a round of calls upon his artist acquaintance. Some of these knew Laurence Bell, and they shook their heads ominously when the dealer spoke of his protégé.

“It looked as if he was going to do great things last year,” said a painter of some repute; “but since then he has grown

idle and conceited—a hanger-on of Madame d'Aspramonte's. I am afraid you won't get a great haul out of Mr. Bell's success, Mocatti. The young man promised well; but he has dried up, sir—dried up."

Mr. Mocatti left his friends depressed and meditative. He felt his disappointment very keenly. He had hoped so much from the little boy he had picked up on a London door-step—so much *kudos*, and so much solid pudding in the shape of pecuniary recompense. It was not the fear of money loss which so deeply affected him, though he had a very sincere regard for his money, and considerable pleasure in the augmentation of his wealth. But in this case his hopes had soared above the mere acquisition of so much vulgar dross. He had been sneered at as a pretender; his protégés had been denounced as charlatans; his art decried as tricky and commonplace—of the

shop, shabby. To Laurence Bell he had looked for the assertion of his own taste and judgment. He had boasted of his *trouvaille*—his unconscious genius, who was to astound the slow-coaches of the Academy—his budding Raffaele. Nor was this all. Latent in Antonio Mocatti's selfish soul there was a dim spark of affection for the fatherless lad whose fate he had taken into his hands. The boy's fair Raffaele face, his helplessness, his plastic, almost womanish character, had endeared him to his taskmaster; and in the disappointment which the Neapolitan felt to-day there was a keener sting than the mere sense of loss that afflicts the speculator.

“Who shall say that I was not right, after all?” he argued, after abandoning himself for a while to despair. “This picture of which he raves may make a hit that will more than realise my hopes. He believes

in it himself; and the instincts of genius are infallible. Why do I goad and torment him because he has not covered many yards of canvas? I have sighed for a blue diamond, and this picture may prove the matchless gem of my heart's desire. Shall I be angry with him because he has not given me a sack of blue diamonds? No, rather let me restore and cherish him with the tender cares of friendship. Poor fragile creature, let me snatch him from the yawning jaws of the grave."

While the bells were ringing for afternoon service, Mr. Mocatti drove to North Audley-street. He was anxious to discover what ravages last night's torments had made on his protégé's peace.

He found Laurence in walking-costume, restlessly pacing his small sitting-room; and he could see by the freshness of the painter's gloves and the Parma violets in his button-

hole that the influence of the Princess d'Aspramonte was still in the ascendant.

"He is going to call at the villa," Mr. Mocatti said to himself.

The painter did not wait to be interrogated.

"I have just this moment returned from Fulham," he cried. "Her people tell me she is at Brighton. Can you believe it, Mocatti? There was no mention of Brighton last night. O Mocatti, do you think she would deny herself to me?"

"*Que sais-je?*" replied the Neapolitan, with his shrug *dans la manière de Méphistophélès*. "Do I think the wind will be in the west to-morrow because it is in the west to-day? With your English climate that is a question your wisest cannot answer. Your English climate is all that there is of the most accursed; but it is not so capricious as Giulia d'Aspramonte.

When you can pin your faith to that little image of a fox up yonder over that stable-yard, which twists and twists, sometimes his nose to the east, sometimes his nose to the west, you may rely on Madame d'Aspramonte."

"You think, then, that she was at home when I called?" asked Laurence nervously.

"I think nothing. I would guard myself well to think, where it is question of the Princess. What more likely than that she should be at Brighton? If the whim seized her to go, she would go. How I pity that wretched German woman whom she drags about the world with her! That woman is a relation of Herr Frolich's; and between those two there will be mischief for the Princess before the end of the world. Come with me, *mon ami*; my phaeton is below. I will drive thee somewhere in the fresh air, and take thee home

to dinner. I have some hock which is more precious than the constancy of women, and almost as rare."

Laurence Bell was too feeble to offer any resistance to his patron's hospitable desires. He followed Mr. Mocatti to the phaeton no more meekly than he would have followed him to the stake, so apathetic had he become to all the minor details of existence.

Once seated in his phaeton, that pride in horseflesh, which seems a natural attribute of mankind, occupied the thoughts of Mr. Mocatti; and he allowed his companion full leisure for meditation, while his own artistic eye dwelt fondly on the perfections of his chestnut *steppares*.

Laurence sat silent by the side of his Mentor, looking dreamily out at the newly-budding trees and the still blue sky, bright and cold as the face of a heartless woman.

There were the usual Sunday-afternoon promenaders in the Park: the swells of the counter and the counting-house, rejoicing in their glorious raiment after a week's imprisonment, and happy in the idea that they are enjoying themselves after the manner of the *gandins* from the Rag and the Traveller's. It is the day on which the tigers roam abroad, and ape the stately walk and kingly roar of the lion. Here and there, perhaps, a little group of the genuine leonine breed congregate to yawn and stare in friendly companionship; but the tiger species is in the ascendant, and the monarch of beasts feels himself in a false position.

"Come away, Fitz, old fellow," says young Slender of the Prancers Purple to his friend Fitz-Shallow of the Plungers Red; "I smell *patchouli*. There must be tradespeople somewhere. I consider the great problem of the present age is what a

man is to do with himself on Sunday. If he stops at home, he reads *Bell's Life* and that sort of thing, till he makes his eyes weak; if he drops in at the Zoo, he meets all manner of unknown people from the immediate neighbourhood; and if he drives to Richmond or Greenwich, he finds himself crowded by creatures with intrusive elbows, who talk loud and drink port and sherry."

To display himself and his phaeton in the Park was the delight of Mr. Mocatti's heart. He had the continental idea, that to drive a pair of horses was a rare and glorious achievement; and he had the continental notion, that the merits of a horse may be measured by the height and general splashiness of his action. To tear through the drive with sound and fury, and some danger to scudding children and young persons with perambulators, was to Mr. Mocatti's mind the perfection of scientific

driving; and he despised the tranquil-looking, fair-faced "insulars" who trotted their drags and phaetons calmly past him, and who stared in supercilious wonder at his *bruyant attelage*.

After displaying himself in the Park to his heart's content, and receiving the admiring glances of innumerable nursemaids, Mr. Mocatti drove to Hammersmith Bridge, and thence to the fair stretch of common-land between Barnes and Putney.

"*Eh bien, mon ami*, you are mute as the tombs of the Pharaohs. What do you think of all this time?" he asked Laurence at last.

"I have been thinking of my picture. It haunts me, Mocatti, like a living presence. The face that I have painted is always before me."

"Paint other faces, and you will cease to be haunted."

“I cannot.”

“Ah, well! we will see about that by and by, when your picture has been exhibited, and has made people talk. I wish you would let me see it.”

“No, Mocatti; there I am firm as rock. I have suffered too much from ‘suggestion.’ If I make mistakes, they shall be all my own. I will not alter a line by the advice of friend or critic. When the picture is ready to send in, you shall see it. It will then be too late for the possibility of alteration.”

“I languish for the hour of its completion. I have already begun to diplomate for a good position; and I know if the picture is worth anything, it will be well hung. Tell me frankly now, Laurence; you must know whether you have done well or ill. Is the picture as good as your *Lady Macbeth*?”

Mr. Bell looked at his Mentor with a contemptuous smile.

“I should indeed have wasted my life if my Roman lady were no better than the Lady Macbeth,” he said. “That was the inspiration of an hour, painted in less than a week. To this picture I have given months of solid labour, sleepless nights of thought and study. I have brought to bear upon it all the resources of my art, all the secrets that the experience of the dead can impart to the living. You could never imagine the books I have searched for hints and suggestions, the experiments I have made, the toil I have wasted in order to make this one work a lasting triumph. I am not very strong, you see, Mocatti,” the young man continued somewhat sadly; “and I have sometimes fancied latterly that this picture may be the last I shall ever paint. I don’t want to die and be

forgotten like a lawyer's clerk or a shop-keeper's errand-boy. Seeing I have no kindred to be sorry for me, I want my name to be remembered by the world—at least as that of a man who might have done something, if he had lived longer."

"*Pouah!*" cried Mr. Mocatti, "that is a young man's fancy. Youthful genius always thirsts for death; it is a kind of short-cut to immortality. The picture or the poem might have been better, but the painter or the poet died so young. It requires the force of a Titian or a Goethe to surmount the ignominy of old age. But we are not going to let you die, *mon ami*. You have a little cold, a little fever; you have been working a little too hard on one subject. All that will pass like these chill spring breezes. You shall live to write R.A. after your name."

"*She* would be sorry for me, perhaps,

if I were dead," murmured the painter absently.

He had indeed no desire to survive the single triumph which was now the sole hope and dream of his life. He felt an immeasurable weariness and disgust, for which there seemed no other cure than death.

Mr. Mocatti looked at him for a few moments with a compassionate smile, and then relapsed into silence.

"This fever, this madness must have their course. It is my work," the dealer said to himself remorsefully. "*Je ne savais pas de quelle trempe il était, ce jeune homme.*"

Mr. Mocatti drove across Barnes Common, and returned London-wards by Putney Bridge. He had just cleared the town of Fulham, dashing along the middle of the road at his usual pace, when he had to make way a little for an advancing barouche.

Laurence looked up, as the carriage passed ; looked up in time to see the Princess in her accustomed listless, half-reclining attitude, but with a bright animated face.

Her German *dame d'atours* was by her side, and opposite her were seated Herr Frolich, and Signor Carlo Vitzi the Swedish tenor.

“O, ho !” cried Mr. Mocatti, when the barouche had passed ; “this is how the Princess spends her Sunday at Brighton. *Il s'agit du Star and Gartèrre.*”

ACT THE THIRD.

WRITTEN IN WATER.

SCENE THE FIRST.

A FINAL SITTING.

"Let us give up, go down : she will not care.
Though all the stars made gold of all the air,
And the sea moving saw before it move
One moon-flower, making all the foam-flowers fair ;
Though all the waves went over us, and drove
Deep down the stifling lips and drowning hair,—
She would not care."

AFTER that rencontre on the Fulham-road very little was said between Signor Mocatti and his protégé with reference to Madame d'Aspramonte. Laurence dined with his patron, and no gloomier guest had ever seated himself at the liberally-furnished table of Pelham Lodge.

The picture-dealer kept a furtive watch upon his guest while he gorged himself

with macaroni à la tomate, and devoured unknown quantities of stewed beef stuffed with spices and raisins. He was sorely grieved to see how deeply the shaft had gone home to this foolish young heart.

“What if I have killed him?” he asked himself. “Ah, but no! men do not die for love. It is a passing fever, which never kills. Did not I feel the pain when that woman jilted me? Would I not have laid myself down in the dust, that she should trample on me with her feet, once upon a time? And now I mock myself of her beauty and her wickedness, and would rather marry the most insipid English miss between Bayswater and Chelsea than the widow of Benjamin d’Aspramonte. And shall this young man die for love of a woman who must be nearly old enough to be his mother? A thousand thunders, no!”

And then Mr. Mocatti pressed the wines upon his favourite.

“Thou wilt taste that Liebfraumilch, Laurence? Her Swedish tenor will find nothing equal to that at the Star and Garter. Thou wilt not? The Chambertin, then? It is more generous than the heart of woman, and sweeter than her breath. I have heard that your Princess smokes opium, by the way. It is possible. I should not think her reflections are too agreeable when she is alone, or her dreams too pleasant when she sleeps. Does she ever sleep, though? I should doubt it. Perhaps her maid reads French novels to her for a few hours in the night, and she may call that sleep. But for Giulia d’Aspramonte to sleep honestly, like commonplace people who can snore in forgetfulness of all the world, I cannot believe it. She is not of the class of people who sleep, unless

after the manner of your Lady Macbeth—in prowling here and there with a lamp, and wringing her restless hands. Come, Laurence, let us think of her no more, or only think of her for what she is worth—an idle coquette, without either heart or principle, a creature accursed with an insatiable thirst for flattery, only to be appeased by the sacrifice of new victims. We will go back to the old life, my child, and forget her.”

Laurence Bell laughed aloud.

“Go back !” he cried ; “do you think any man could do that ? Could Napoleon have gone back to his Corsican island, and begun life afresh, in the profession of his father the barrister, after Arcola ? He might have been a distinguished member of the Corsican bar if fate had set him in the track at the beginning. But could the young general of the Republic have gone

back to Ajaccio if his mother had entreated him never so urgently? And you think I could go back to Charnock-street, and be happy and peaceful as I was before you lured me away from my true friends? No, Mocatti! Even if they would take me back, and accept my remorse as an atonement for my defection, and find a tender welcome for the returned prodigal,—if they could be so generous as to do this, which I think they could, it is not in me to retrace my steps. I am not proud, Mocatti: I would go back to-morrow and humiliate myself to the very dust before Tom Graystone and his daughter; but of what avail would it be to place me amongst the old surroundings if you could not give me the old peace of mind? The fever that possesses me is not to be cured so easily.”

“What will cure that fever?”

“Success. Let me achieve one triumph,

one signal success, and I think I shall be content. I think I might work on with my old industry, and—”

“And forget Giulia d’Aspramonte?”

“Forget her! No, Mocatti. She is a woman who does not suffer those who have once loved her ever to forget. Lethe has no antidote for the cup of poison which her worshippers drink. I tell you, man, this woman is a sorceress; and it is by the force of witchcraft, not love, that she holds her victims. Love! Can it be love which I feel for that woman, whom I know to be false and vain, heartless and treacherous? Can there be love without respect, without faith, without the sense of security? No, Mocatti—again and again, no! We laugh at mediæval legends of enchantment—we wonder at the folly of our forefathers who believed in witchcraft—until some day the fatal sorceress comes across our path, and holds us in her unholy thrall.”

"And the worst of it is, that modern prejudice forbids the burning of our witches," said Mr. Mocatti.

After this there was no more said about the Roman widow. The dealer and his protégé discoursed of art. The younger man talked with enthusiasm, but unhappily it was the wild rhapsodical eloquence of a man who has arrived at that stage in which it is easier to talk of making gigantic efforts than to set about making them. Mocatti encouraged him to the uttermost. This enterprising speculator in the artistic capabilities of his fellow-man experienced sincere remorse for the error of his ways with regard to the young painter. He had introduced the victim to the enchantress, and she who was to have infused only a little fire into his veins had consumed his very life in devastating flame. It had been a fatal mistake—unless indeed the hidden picture

should prove an unparalleled success ; in which event Mr. Mocatti was prepared to forgive himself and the Princess d'Aspramonte.

To the exhibition of this hidden picture the dealer looked forward with anxiety scarcely second to that of the man who had painted it. Surely there must be something great in this work, which had absorbed the young man's time and thought to the exclusion of every other subject.

"I must not interfere with his habits until the picture has been sent in," thought the enterprising Mocatti. "If he has contrived to put his infatuation and his madness upon canvas, we may have something that will create a furore. What is the subtle something which constitutes success nowadays ? The turn of a head, the fashion of a drapery, the glance of an eye—*que sais-je ?*"

Is it necessary to state that Mr. Bell went to his painting-room at the Roman villa earlier than usual on Monday morning, though he had sworn to himself on Sunday that he would never again look upon the face of that modern Medea, in whose caldron such deadly draughts had been brewed for him? As Madame d'Aspramonte's barouche rolled on Richmondwards the young man had made stern resolves in the bitterness of his heart. What was he not ready to do in order to revenge himself upon this woman? What would he not do to advertise his contempt and aversion? Never again would he look on that hated face. Her picture—the picture by which his fame was to have gone down to posterity—the picture which yet lacked those last touches that were to make it approach still nearer to ideal perfection,—what of that? In his first impulse of

jealous rage Laurence Bell was prepared to sacrifice even this picture, even his hopes of glory, if by so doing he could demonstrate his disdain for this false siren.

This tempest of passion passed away, and left the young man even more weak and helpless than he had been before the storm. Very little sleep visited his eyelids during the night that followed that meeting in the Fulham-road ; and what sleep came to him brought dreams that were worse torture than the bitter thoughts that attended his waking hours. Alas for this dreamer ! He had been lulled to his enchanted sleep by honeyed flatteries from a woman's rosy lips ; and now the awakening came with an appalling suddenness, and he discovered the fatal falsehood of that sweet cradle-song which had beguiled him to his slumber. He knew now that he had suffered himself to love this woman ; not with

the pure confiding affection which he had felt for Amy Graystone, but with the fatal unreasoning passion which knows neither limit nor governing principle.

He loved her. Yes; this agony which consumed his soul all through the quiet night-time—now vague and shapeless in the nightmare of his dreams—now palpable and real in his waking torments,—this unspeakable torture was Jealousy—demon twin-brother of that false god called Love.

He loved her. With the full knowledge of her cruelty and her falsehood, he loved her, and must love her to the end. It had pleased him to defend her when Mocatti had presumed to blame; but even while uttering that defence he had been fully conscious of her unworthiness. Had she been ten times more wicked than she was, he must have loved her still—blindly, impiously, as men have loved ever since

the world began ; fondly, foolishly, wickedly, as Samson loved Delilah, as Antony loved Cleopatra, as the conqueror of Trafalgar loved that beautiful low-born Emma of questionable manners and more than questionable antecedents.

Only by the bitterness of the awakening did he know how unutterably sweet had been the dream ; only now that all hope was over did he know how much he had dared to hope. He had fancied himself beloved. He had lived on the dream of a bright future in which he should be the greatest painter of the age, and the husband of Giulia d'Aspramonte—this queen, this goddess, who had come down from amidst the clouds that veil the glory to raise him up to a place among the gods.

And now, behold, the dream was over, and he knew that he had been the sport of an idle coquette, who had fooled him

to the top of his bent, from mere *désœuvrement*. He had fretted his heart-strings to make music for an intellectual Sybarite, who took no pains to conceal her indifference for him now that she had found a fresh amusement in the patronage of the first stage-singer who happened to come across her pathway!

“And I thought she loved me!” cried the young man in his despair; “I fancied that our lives would be spent together in the lands of poetry and art, and that for every grace her beauty should impart to my existence, my genius should pay her tenfold in the glory it reflected upon her name. O, God, what have I to live for, now that dream is over? What pleasure can even fame bring to me, if this woman is not to share it?”

In this hour of supreme anguish it did indeed seem to the painter as if the glory



of a Raffaele would avail him little without the love of Giulia d'Aspramonte.

"There is always death," he said to himself presently ; "there is always that one common conclusion which any man can make of all his troubles. The wisest amongst the ancients could find no better solution for the great enigma. Shall I be more patient than Cato, or braver than Brutus?"

As the tempest of jealousy, the first sharp anguish of disappointment, abated a little, those ambitious hopes which had of late sustained Laurence Bell in every moment of doubt and despondency were revived in his breast.

"I will not die till I have made my name famous," he said to himself with passionate energy. "I will teach that haughty woman the difference between the triumphs of the Opera-house and the fame

of a great painter. She has grown weary of my art and my love. She may regret me when my love has perished with my life, and my art remains behind to teach her that my love was worth having."

SCENE THE SECOND.

TO THE DREGS.

"Voyez-vous le poisson,
Comme il vient à fleur d'eau reprendre l'hameçon?"

It was very early the next morning when the painter presented himself at the Brompton villa, with a face so ghastly as to awaken dismay in the mind of the major-domo, who had for some time been aware of the change in that fair young face.

"Madame has returned from Brighton?" asked Laurence, as he crossed the threshold, with its warning motto, and watchdog in mosaic from a sketch by Sir Edgar Verbochhoeven.

"But yes, monsieur," replied the well-trained domestic; "monsieur has the air

not to find himself well. "Would monsieur be pleased to take something—a little taste of cognac, a glass of wine of Zeres?"

Monsieur declined the friendly offer with an absent shake of the head. He had drunk rather deeply of Mr. Mocatti's famous Burgundy on the previous evening, trying to extinguish the fire raging in his breast with draughts of potent wine, and the fire had only burned so much the more fiercely. This morning he had touched nothing. His lips were parched with fever, his eyes bloodshot, his hands burning, his costume unusually careless; and thus he came to present himself to the critical eyes of a patroness who had no sympathy with agony that could not pose itself in a graceful attitude, and only disgust for a dying man who did not know how to drape himself artistically.

The servant followed Mr. Bell to his

painting-room, where the shutters had not yet been opened. A household takes its cue from the humour of its chief: and the servants at Adrian's Villa had for some time past been a little neglectful of the apartment devoted to Mr. Bell. A little dust more or less could be of small importance to a young man who seemed to go through life in a waking dream, and a young man who had obviously become a very indifferent person in the eyes of Madame la Princesse.

"I will write to Madame d'Aspramonte," said Laurence, while the man opened the shutters.

He seated himself at a little writing-table near one of the windows. It was not the Reisner *bonheur du jour*; that had been removed to Madame d'Aspramonte's boudoir, whence it had been brought to adorn Mr. Bell's apartment by the order

of his enthusiastic patroness. The enthusiasm had exhausted itself, and the *chefs-d'œuvre* in the way of decorative upholstery had gone back to their accustomed places.

“ You promised me one more sitting,” wrote the painter. “ Let it be for to-day. It was cruel to deceive me yesterday, and as needless as it was cruel. What claim have I upon your time? what authority over your actions? You hold my heart and soul in your relentless hand. You have taken all, and have given nothing. O, do not think that I complain. You have robbed me of my dearest hope, my fondest dream; nay, rather that one bright vision which was my very life. In doing this you have at least simplified the plan of my existence. I have henceforward nothing to live for except glory; since I cannot teach myself a new art, and turn public singer, in the hope of pleasing you.

"Even my hopes of fame depend in some measure on you. If I win renown, it will be won as much by your beauty as by my art. Remember your promise. For pity's sake, do not refuse me this one final sitting, even though you may have pleasanter engagements that will render your compliance inconvenient. It is not for very long that I shall trouble you with any requests."

"You will take this to Madame d'Aspramonte at once," said Laurence, as he gave his letter to the servant.

"I will take it to madame's maid, monsieur," replied the man discreetly. "Her excellency is rarely visible at this hour."

The painter sighed wearily as he went to his work. For a long time that work had been very difficult for him. A luminous mist seemed to come between him and his canvas; the figure of his divinity floated in a golden vapour before his dazzled eyes.

As he moved backwards and forwards before his easel, the beautiful face seemed to follow him with a mocking smile.

“My sight is losing its old power,” he thought. “A cautious man would take fright at such symptoms, and strike work for a week or two; but my time is too short for so much as a day’s respite.”

He worked every day with increasing fervour, with a wild energy that had been unknown to him during his most enthusiastic moments in Charnock-street. He was like the racehorse, that doubles his speed as the winning-post draws nigh and the chances of success seem more desperate.

The Princess generally devoted her mornings to reading a French novel, or quarrelling with her German companion, while the patient abigail brushed her long black hair. She was rather pleased than otherwise to receive Laurence Bell’s re-

proachful letter. It afforded her five minutes' distraction ; and, although rather hackneyed in tone, was at least better than Dulau's latest importation from the emporium of Dentu, which happened to be insufferably dull.

The despairing tone of that letter was really pleasing to Giulia d'Aspramonte. From her earliest girlhood, when she had flaunted her fresh young beauty before the humble citizens of the *bourgeois* quarter in which her lot was cast, she had thirsted for praise and admiration : and now, when her glass told her but too plainly that the splendour of her beauty was on the wane, she was only the more eager to receive tribute to that fading glory. Arsène Houssaye has said that until her fortieth birthday a woman's life may be computed by so many summers ; but after the passing of that fatal Rubicon, beauty counts

her years by the chilling winters that wither her roses and whiten her locks. The day was very near at hand when Madame d'Aspramonte must enter the frozen regions of winter; and the consciousness that it was so by no means improved that lady's temper.

The painter's letter bore upon it the impress of real despair; and this was a rare species of flattery even for Giulia d'Aspramonte. Many men had talked about dying because of her cruelty; but this was the only man who had ever set about doing it in earnest. Of course this victim would ultimately recover, and marry some commonplace young person in his own sphere of life, and spoil the tragedy by an anticlimax; but in the mean time his despair was interesting.

Have you ever, O non-piscatorially-disposed reader, watched the manœuvres

of a disciple of the gentle Izaak? Have you ever wondered to behold his indomitable patience, his artistic manipulation of rod, float, or fly, only to marvel at the rapture inspired by the small result of so much trouble?

He whips the little silvery-scaled object out of the water with the air of a man who has achieved a victory. The prize is only a gudgeon, scarcely a mouthful for the household cat; but your gentle Waltonian is content—he has had his sport. The victim may be worth nothing; but in the practice of those arts which ensnared him to his cruel death there was rapture and delight for the enthusiastic angler. So it was with Giulia d'Aspramonte. The conquest of a young painter was but a small triumph for the lady whose beauty and wealth had been the talk and marvel of half the cities on the Continent; but the

pleasures of the sport were very sweet to this fair angler, who set her lines to catch the hearts of men.

“Let them tell Mr. Bell that I will come to him,” she said to her companion, who was a much less important person than Mademoiselle Félicité. That sallow-faced damsel’s skill in hairdressing was of an exceptional order; and it is much easier to find elderly German widows who can bear an unlimited amount of snubbing than smart young Parisiennes with a natural genius for the building of chignons and the adjustment of bandeaux.

The Princess dressed herself with more than usual care, and went down to the painting-room by and by with a scarlet Indian shawl draped upon her imperial shoulders. She plucked a spray of blossom as she passed through the orangery, and she went into the painter’s apartment

with the rich waxen flowers in her hair, making an atmosphere of perfume around and about her.

Mr. Bell started nervously as the door opened, and came a few paces from his easel, as if he would have rushed to welcome the enchantress; but in the next moment he stopped suddenly, and drew himself up with an air of sullen dignity.

“Good-morning, Mr. Bell!” said the Princess.

“Good-morning, madame! I scarcely dared hope that you would honour me by complying with my request—after—yesterday.”

The Princess looked at her protégé with an arch smile, and then broke into a little silvery laugh. She saw that her victim was suffering; but your gentle Waltonian feels as much pity for the gudgeon quivering in mid-air at the end of his line as Giulia

d'Aspramonte felt for this last martyr at the shrine of Ashtaroth.

“We played you a little trick yesterday, mon ami,” she said in her sweetest tone. “It was scarcely fair, perhaps; but what will you? Herr Frolich insisted on bringing that Swedish singer to my box after you went away on Saturday night; and as I want him to sing at my next concert, I was obliged to be civil to him. *De là* our dinner at Richmond yesterday afternoon. You called while I was dressing; and as there was no time for explanation, I allowed my people to invent that little fable about Brighton. You see, a barouche can hold only four; and then of late you have been so gloomy a guest, that one might almost as well see the Egyptian *tête de mort* at a banquet. I suppose it is the privilege of genius to be gloomy.”

“No, madame; but it is your happy gift

to inflict misery on all who come within your influence."

"*Vraiment!* What a pity they persist in coming! There is always the door. And now for the sitting, if you please; and let it be understood that it is to be positively the last. I am a little tired of your picture, Mr. Bell, and am inclined to think that the Fornarina must have found her existence rather wearisome."

The Princess threw herself listlessly into a ponderous old three-cornered oak chair, upon which mitred abbots had sat in the days of old. She consented with a chilling indifference to the painter's careful posing of her head, and yawned audibly during the operation. That one yawn was in itself enough to dishearten and disgust the man whose nerves had so long been overstrung. He went to his work, but he went to it in a despondent frame of mind,

and his depression increased with the growing consciousness that he was doing no good. It was one thing to place Madame d'Aspramonte's unresisting head in a given position, but it was another thing to obtain the required expression in those dark languorous eyes which were to be the chief glory of his picture.

To-day there was neither softness nor languor in the eyes of the Roman Princess. They followed every movement of the painter with a cold hard stare that seemed to set his teeth on edge. Those hard cruel glances kindled a mad rage in his heart. He could fain have thrown down his brushes and palette with a savage execration against this un pitying creature. Was this the woman who, in the old days of enchantment, had stood beside him as he worked, watching every movement of his brush with tender sympathetic eyes? Was this the woman

whose lips had whispered such prophecies of future greatness, whose poetic fancy had shaped such dreams of coming glory? Is it not somewhat difficult to realise the different phases of the same character? Mary Stuart sitting amidst her maidens on the deck of the royal vessel, while tinkling lutes and pretty French versicles beguile the tedious voyage, and that Mary who sat by Darnley's bed and clasped him by the hand, one hour before he was found lying dead under the stars?

"How your eyes glare when you look at me, Mr. Bell!" exclaimed the Princess, after a silence of some duration. "It seems to me you are scarcely in a happy mood for your work to-day, and that I run some hazard of losing my time. You march backwards and forwards before your easel, but your brush seems to do very little execution."

“No!” cried the young man impatiently, “I cannot paint to-day, nor any other day. The power to work is gone. The strength of will, the wealth of fancy, gone—gone! My brain is empty, cold, dark as a tomb. Ah, what a change has befallen me since first I crossed your fatal threshold, enthusiastic, ambitious, full of bright hopes and indomitable courage! Now my weak hand falters and falls powerless at the least word of discouragement. My enfeebled fancy can no longer give form to the fitful dreams that mock my brain with their vanishing splendour. Ah, yes, madame, you are right! I am in no happy mood to-day. This is your work, Princess. If it is a grand achievement to break hearts, you may be proud of your latest triumph.”

“My work?”

“Yes, yours. It is you who have consumed my brain in the torments of a per-

petual conflict between hope and despair ; it is you who have exhausted all the force of my intellect in frivolous emotions, in petty agitations, in a pitiful struggle to satisfy the caprices of your idleness, the demands of your vanity. My fate was in your hand. What use have you made of your power ? You might have been my guiding star, my good genius ; you might have used your influence nobly, for my good and for the good of the world ; but instead of this you chose to make me the minister to your vanity, the fool of your own folly. And now that my devotion grows wearisome, you have neither remorse for the wrong you have done nor compassion for your victim. O, why, why have you used me so cruelly ? What unconscious wrong have I ever done you ? What Còrsican vow of vengeance have you sworn against me ? To what powers of hell

have you pledged yourself to inflict such inhuman torture on an unhappy fellow-creature, whose only crime has been to love and to believe in you?"

"I came here to sit for my picture, Mr. Bell," said the Princess coldly, "and I am in no humour for melodramatic tirades, however eloquent. At night, with stage-lamps and appropriate costume, your discourse might be eminently entertaining; but as I am already overdue at one morning performance, I do not care to be detained here in order to witness another."

"You are going out?"

"Yes," replied Madame d'Aspramonte, with her watch in her hand; "I ought to have been in the Hanover-square Rooms at three o'clock; it is already ten minutes past."

"You are going to a morning concert?"

"Precisely."



"At which Signor Vitzi sings, of course?"

"I do not perceive the 'of course.' *Mais cela se peut.* It is very possible that Signor Vitzi may be amongst the artists."

The painter made no reply. His passion had exhausted itself in the torrent of reproach with which he had for the first time ventured to assail his patroness. What more could he say? By what right had he presumed to say so much? Whom or what had he to blame, from first to last, except himself and his own folly? This lady had condescended to be his patroness; she had given him facilities for the carrying on of his work—a commission which, successfully executed, might have brought him fame and fortune.

In all this had he any cause of complaint against her?

Common sense would answer no; but an instinct more subtle than common sense

told Laurence Bell that he had been wronged. He had been made the plaything of a woman's caprice; and now that the caprice had given place to a new whim, he shared the fate common to playthings. She had patronised him for her own pleasure, and not for his benefit, and did not care to patronise him an hour longer than her whim lasted.

This was the wrong she had done him; and beyond this there was a deeper wrong which she had inflicted—a wrong done by tender glances that meant nothing, by softly-spoken words in which there had been neither truth nor feeling—all the cunning arts of that foul sorcery which women call flirtation.

The Princess rose and drew her shawl round her.

"Our last sitting is terminated, Mr. Bell," she said in her iciest tone. "When

may I have the honour of seeing my portrait?"

"Whenever you please," answered the painter despondently. "I find it hard to satisfy myself; but if labour can produce perfection, I have gone the right way to achieve it."

"When must your picture be sent in to the Academy?"

"Early in this month."

"Indeed! I should like a few of my friends to see the portrait before it goes in. Will it be finished by next Sunday? I believe Sunday is a great day for the privileged inspection of pictures yet unseen by the public?"

"Yes, madame."

"Very well. On next Sunday, then, you will bring your friend Mr. Mocatti, and unlock the doors of your mysterious easel?"

"As you please, madame."

"And after that, I suppose, I may organise the decoration of my music-room?"

"Madame !"

"That is to say, you will no longer require this room as a studio? For, of course, it is an understood thing that the idea of the frescoes is to be abandoned."

"It must be as you wish, madame," answered the painter, whose replies sounded as if from the lips of an automaton.

"It is not at all as I wish. My wish was to have seen my music-room a second Signature chamber. But as I cannot hope to enjoy the venerable age of Abraham or Methuselah, I have ordered a West-end upholsterer to decorate my apartment *à la Renaissance*, in the usual *carton-pierre* style of decoration. I am really sorry to think that your Amphion and Orpheus should have proved such impracticable people."

Laurence Bell flung a despairing look towards the corner where the Shepherd of Mount Citheron turned his face to the wall. Yes ; he had been granted opportunities rarely given to ambitious youth, and he had frittered away his chances in feeble attempts, in puerile experiments, in childish endeavours to achieve the impossible. Little wonder that he had exhausted the patience of a lady in whose character patience was not a strong point. And yet he had meant to do so much. He had dreamed such glorious dreams. All was over. This was his *congé*, which the proud lips of his patroness had just pronounced. She had done with him. She told him so in the coldest, plainest words. His passionate reproaches aroused no anger in her breast. She was far too indifferent to be angry. With no plainer speech, with no colder accents could she have dismissed a

tradesman or a servant who had ceased to please her.

And yet he had sat at her feet. He had told the story of his love,—not quite plainly, but in language so thinly veiled, with passion so little restrained, that this woman must have been dull and cold indeed if she had failed to understand the passionate heart which she had set beating so wildly. They had read Tasso together, and had talked of the poet and the princess. They had read and talked together of Chastelard and Mary Stuart—that Chastelard who may well have deemed love only a synonym for fatality :

“ Look, it may be love was a sort of curse
Made for my plague, and mixed up with my days
Somewise in their beginning ; or, indeed,
A bitter birth begotten of sad stars
At mine own body's birth.”

All was over. Laurence Bell stood
with white lips and heavy down-cast eye-

lids as the Princess left the room. He did not even look up to watch her departure, though his last hope, his last faint thrill of rapture went with her footsteps. The rustling of her silken dress told him that she was gone. His own heart told him that she had vanished out of his life as completely as she had gone out of that room.

SCENE THE THIRD.

MADAME IS MEDITATIVE.

“The burden of much gladness. Life and lust
Forsake thee, and the face of thy delight ;
And under foot the heavy hour strews dust,
And overhead strange weathers burn and bite ;
And where the red was, lo, the bloodless white ;
And where truth was, the likeness of a liar ;
And where day was, the likeness of the night :
This is the end of every man's desire.”

MADAME D'ASPRAMONTE busied herself with the organisation of her second concert, and the Swedish tenor was invited to fill a prominent part in the evening's entertainment. He was in no manner superior to many other singers who were at the lady's disposal. He was only a little newer, and it was for novelty in some form or other that the Princess sighed.

Sooth to say, the dinner at Richmond had not been a startling success. Herr Frolich had done his utmost to make things agreeable. Herr Frolich's elderly aunt, Madame Baumgarten, had been mild and inoffensive. The young lion of the day had been all that is attentive and complimentary — inexpressibly honoured by Madame d'Aspramonte's notice, unspeakably enraptured by her praise of his genius, her prophecies of his future fame.

And this sort of thing—these pretty airy compliments from well-bred and carefully-attired genius—had once been the wine of life to Giulia d'Aspramonte. This elegant devotion, after Scribe or Sardou, had once been all-sufficient for her. But it was so no longer. She had tasted a more fiery vintage than this pale, bloodless champagne—unreal and evanescent, sparkling and dancing in the sunlight one

moment, and the next instant vapid, flat, and tasteless. She had known what it was to be loved in earnest, and though the lover was only a foolish young man, a dreamer of dreams, a creature of aspirations never to be translated into achievement, the reality of his love had been powerful enough to render all conventional devotion very uninteresting to Giulia d'Aspramonte.

There is an end of all things, and it seemed to Madame d'Aspramonte, after she had given the painter his *congé*, as if the end of her coquetries and triumphs must needs be near at hand. She was tired of admiration in which there was neither depth nor sincerity. She was weary of love so earnest as to be almost despair. She knew that Laurence Bell loved her, and the profound reality of his love had given a charm and an interest to his society

while the sense of that truth and earnestness was yet a novel sensation. When the novelty wore off, Mr. Bell remained only a foolish young man, the first-fruits of whose genius had proved delusive as the apples of the Dead Sea—a young man whose devotion was worth very little, since it was never likely to reflect glory upon its object.

To a modern Tasso the Princess would have been very gracious ; but for a poet-aster, whose rhymes were never likely to ring loud through the wide realms of poetry, she would have felt small compassion.

For the man who had given her truth and passion, that were new even to her, she had neither gratitude nor pity. In some remote corner of her hard heart there was a dim consciousness that this earnest love was a pure and beautiful thing, and



that it would have been well for her if she had been able to appreciate and understand it. She was sorry for herself, as suffering loss for lack of some missing sense which made the happiness of other women. But she felt no softening pang of sorrow for the victim who must needs perish by reason of her hardness.

“Mocatti is right,” she said to herself, as she sat before the glass that had begun to tell her such hard truths when she was rash enough to consult it in the full glare of the spring sunlight; “if I live to be old, my last years will be very lonely. It is a pity I cannot attach myself to some one. I suppose there is a kind of pleasure in the love of one’s fellow-creatures, or people would scarcely make so much fuss about it as they do.”

Madame d’Aspramonte anticipated some

gratification to herself from the exhibition of the picture that had been so slow to reach completion. The painter's enthusiastic devotion to this one work had occasioned considerable talk amongst the privileged circle of Adrian's Villa. People had heard of the easel with its locked doors, and were not slow to condemn the young man's folly.

"No good ever came of fussiness in relation to art," said Sir Edgar Verboch-høeven gravely; "Rubens and Vandyke set about their best works as quietly as if they had been bakers. Poor Haydon was a man who made a great talk and noise about his pictures; and see what a sad end came to all his high-flown fancies! Take things quietly, my dear Mr. Bell, if you mean to be great."

There were others who took a less kindly view of the young painter's enthusiasm.

“He is playing his cards very cleverly,” said an envious rival. “He knows there is no flattery too gross for the D’Aspramonte; and he is shamming madness in the hope of getting a rich wife.”

Closer observers, however, shook their heads despondently when they spoke of Mr. Mocatti’s protégé. “There is the stamp of death upon his face,” they said; “and that woman is answerable for his untimely end.”

The interest felt in the hidden picture was very general. The malicious nourished the hope of assisting at an ignominious failure; the indifferent looked forward to the gratification of a pleasant curiosity; the connoisseurs anticipated a feast in the way of critical discussion and agreeable argument. And then, the exhibition of the picture was just the right sort of occasion for one of those classic banquets, to the perfection of which Madame d’As-

pramonte owed no small portion of her renown.

Thus it was that Madame Baumgarten's notes of invitation for luncheon on the following Sunday were received with a very general feeling of satisfaction, and Giulia d'Aspramonte's friends all declared themselves "charmed," or "delighted," or "so pleased," or even "awfully glad" to attend the unveiling of the mysterious portrait.

While the German widow was penning her notes of invitation, her imperious patroness gave audience to Herr Frolsch in the sacred seclusion of her boudoir. The professor had been admitted to that sacred apartment several times since his return from the Continent, and the servants of the Princess had already begun to wonder whether this German musician was indeed to step into the shoes of Benjamin d'Aspra-

monte. If those who cared to speculate upon the follies and caprices of the Roman Princess had been present during the interview of to-day, they would scarcely have been inclined to back Herr Frolich heavily for the D'Aspramonte stakes. The interview was evidently very far from pleasant. The lady's brow was black as thunder. The gentleman had the air of a man who is accustomed to stormy weather, and somewhat impervious to the roaring of tempestuous blasts, or the pelting of pitiless hailstones terrible as those that smote the people of Pharaoh.

"And Panamas have gone down," said the Princess, with a sullen gloominess of tone and manner.

"They go down, and are going down every day and hour."

"And the Irrigation Company?"

"Is a failure. The paid-up shares are

selling for a song. Very few people care to touch them."

"Have I risked much money in that enterprise?"

"A bagatelle for the representative of a firm which was once almost as great as the house of Caroccio degli Alberti—but more than you may care to lose."

"I cannot afford to lose money," said the Princess with suppressed intensity. "You think—all the world seems to think—that I count my fortune by millions; but that is no longer so. When my husband died he left me so rich that no one could tell me the extent of my wealth."

"Undoubtedly," replied Herr Frolich, with his customary ease of manner; "but he left you the central figure *dans un dédale du commerce*. Madame, you were left the mistress of a gold mine; but you did not know your way about that gold mine. Un-

happily your craving for excitement inspired you with a taste for speculation. You knew that your husband's wealth had flowed in upon him from every quarter of the globe, plenteous as the yellow waters of the Tiber as they roll past the boundary wall of your villa. The machinery that had made him rich was at your disposal. There was only one thing you lacked; and that was the commercial experience of Benjamin d'Aspramonte. You have had your excitement, madame; I hope you do not think it has cost you too dearly."

For some time Herr Frolich had enjoyed an anomalous position *auprès de sa Princesse*.

It was her habit to consult him upon all her affairs; to reject his advice with unmitigated contempt when it ran counter to the whim of the moment, and to upbraid and denounce him when she suffered from

the natural result of her own folly. Herr Frolich endured all this with sublime patience, but not without some expectation of recompense in days to come. He had been the fast friend of her late husband, and the privileged recipient of that gentleman's confidence. He would in all probability have been vested with some power in the affairs of the impetuous lady if old Benjamin d'Aspramonte — always inclined to be distrustful alike of friends and enemies—had not altered his mind once or twice a week as to the wording of his last will and testament ; ultimately leaving his widow sole mistress of his colossal fortune.

He could not bring himself to trust anybody ; and he died oppressed by the agonising consciousness that his money would be wasted.

“She will squander it upon a thousand follies ; she will scatter it in all the gutters

of Europe. She would devour the fortunes of a dozen Pereiras in as many years," said the old man piteously.

His dismal forebodings had not been entirely unfulfilled. There was a broad margin for extravagance in the fortune of the Roman banker; and even Madame d'Aspramonte's capacity for expenditure had not been sufficient to exhaust the results of a long career of success in the commercial world. The Princess was still a rich woman, but she had squandered and lost a great deal of money; and although extravagance was very pleasant to her, loss was very bitter.

Her losses had been heavy. Every venture she had embarked in since her husband's death had been eminently unlucky; and it was only on receiving a balance-sheet from her chief cashier, and going through it quietly with Herr Frolich,

that she was aware how much sterling gold had been transformed into worthless paper during her brief game of speculation.

It was the study of this balance-sheet which had produced the thunder-cloud on Madame d'Aspramonte's brow. This woman, who in the selfish indulgence of her own fancies could give unheard-of sums to her builder or her upholsterer, cherished a sordid love of money for its own sake ; and the contemplation of the figures that made the sum-total of her losses was very painful to her.

"Let those shares be sold—all of them—to-morrow—to-day, if possible !"

"It might be better to hold on," suggested the professor.

"And lose all ? No ! I will sell out at once," exclaimed the impulsive Giulia. "Everything has been unlucky with me this year—loss here, loss there, loss on

every side. Do you know, Maximilian Frolich, it seems to me sometimes that I shall die poor?"

No words can express the horror in the lady's look and tone as she said this. To this woman—who was without the natural affections, the common fears and joys and sorrows that make up the lives of other women—poverty was the one supreme evil. To lose the things that made life agreeable for her, to lose the very zest of existence, to cease to riot in the enjoyment of inexhaustible wealth,—that was how Madame d'Aspramonte understood the word 'poverty.'

And yet there had been a time in which she was a poor innkeeper's daughter, who deemed himself rich when he could give his handsome child a new gown to wear at mass on Sundays. Yes; but that time had long gone by, and in those days Giulia

had been rich in the consciousness of her fresh young beauty, and a prophetic instinct which told her of some great prize that was to fall to her in the universal lottery.

To cease to be wealthy now, when wealth was the only reality in her life, would be a calamity for the horror of which language has no power of expression.

She sat in a gloomy reverie, meditating upon this hideous possibility for some time after her friend and adviser left her.

There was no real cause for her terrors. The poverty she dreaded with such unspeakable loathing was the remotest of possibilities. Her fears were only a part of that weariness of spirit which had taken possession of her. All things that she coveted had been hers; and having enjoyed them there was no more to be wished for, no more to be had upon earth.

She had made her great works, and builded her house, and planted her vineyards. Whatever her eyes desired had been hers; and now, having drained the wine-cup, she sat down weary and despondent, to taste the bitterness of the dregs. "I might have been happier, if I had not been so fortunate," she said to herself. "If I had not married a millionaire, I should have felt younger than I do, at seven-and-thirty years of age; for I should still have had something to wish for."

Maximilian Frolich went away with a smile upon his face—such a smile as might have illuminated the countenance of that astute Florentine secretary of state who wrote the *Prince*.

"She begins to discover her helplessness," he said to himself; "and when she has lost a little more money, and feels a

little more keenly the inconvenience of giving way to her own caprices, my time will be near at hand. There is nothing impossible for the man who knows how to wait."

SCENE THE FOURTH.

“CAN YOU SEE NOTHING THERE?”

“Est-ce un rêve?—

Non, c'est un réveil!”

LAURENCE BELL worked at his picture without rest or respite during that last week; after which the die was to be cast, and the game lost or won. He lived in the painting-room,—that amber-drapiered saloon which was soon to be his no longer. But he was troubled with no visits from the lady of the mansion. The long days went by, and no one came near him except the servant who brought cake and wine on a great antique salver, and who brought it with the air of a gaoler who attends to the necessities of a prisoner of state.

The upholsterer's minions came one morning to take some measurements, and the painter looked at them very much as he might have looked at so many masked dooms-men bearing the paraphernalia of death. If the three-foot rule and the compasses, which these artisans handled so deftly, had been the cord and dagger of the Fehmgericht, they could scarcely have been more symbolical of final condemnation to the man whose brush was to have made this chamber beautiful.

When the men had entered their measurements in dirty little memorandum-books and quietly departed, the painter seated himself on the ground beside his pile of sketches, and cut the painted canvas into ribbons with a pair of scissors merciless as the shears of Atropos. He was possessed by a rage that was almost childish in its unreasonable intensity. Ah, what wasted

care and thought and trouble he had given to the great work which he was never to accomplish ! what experimental dabbings with wax and honey, amber varnish, and white-of-egg ! what study of the traditional arts of *buon fresco* and *fresco secco* ! what careful reading of Van Mander and Vasari, Merimée and Michiels, in search of recondite details of forgotten vehicles and mediæval art-secrets ! And, behold, now the work of a West-end upholsterer, the stereotyped elegance of gold-leaf and papier maché, were to supersede those immortal images of Olympus which had haunted his dreams !

When the work of destruction was complete, he went back to his picture. His labours now were confined to minute trifling with the golden arabesques that coiled and twisted about the glowing drapery. The woman smiled down upon him as he

worked at the hem of her mantle. She stood out from the canvas solid as a statue, with a luminous haze around her head. It was a hard thing for him to resist the fancy that her bosom rose and fell with the motion of a heart beneath the flesh, which seemed to take its subdued tints of rose and carnation from the motion of real living blood. How often had he been tempted to press his parched lips to the cool whiteness of that rounded shoulder, massive as marble against the thick folds of falling drapery !

“ O God, preserve me from madness !” he cried, on the last evening when the delusion was strong upon him as he stood taking his farewell of his work in the declining light. “ I have prayed that I might produce one perfect picture. Was the prayer an impious one, and has it been granted for my destruction ? Have I come too nearly to the perfection of human beauty ?

Have I sinned the sin of Prometheus and Pygmalion, and is my punishment to be akin to theirs? The woman is alive. Her eyes follow me as the eyes of the monster followed Frankenstein; and even her beauty is appalling, for it is the beauty of an unholy simulacrum, rather than the image of a creature made by the hand of God."

During that last week Mr. Mocatti saw very little of his protégé. He looked in at Adrian's Villa during the customary Tuesday-evening reception; but the figure of Laurence Bell was missing from amongst the crowd of semi-fashionables and notabilities who filled the classic salons.

Madame d'Aspramonte honoured her old friend with one of her sweetest smiles.

"*Vous m'avez assez rudoyé à notre dernière rencontre, mon ami,*" she said, laughing; "*mais je ne suis pas inexorable.* Your

protégé's picture is to be exhibited to my friends on Sunday. You may come to see it."

Mr. Mocatti thanked his Princess for this gracious permission, and departed, pleased to have missed Laurence from that crowded temple in which the false goddess received the worship of her votaries.

He called in North Audley-street in the course of the week ; but Laurence was not to be found there, and he did not care to follow his protégé to the painting-room at the villa.

"Sunday will decide everything," he said to himself; "success will console my poor Laurence. If fortune prove kind, he will forget that Giulia d'Aspramonte is cruel. I will take him away to some pleasant retreat, where health and strength may come back to him. But if the portrait should be a failure—"

This was a train of thought which the

Neapolitan trader did not care to pursue. There was that in the face of Laurence Bell which told him the young man would scarcely stand against the rude shocks of untoward fate. A bright burst of warm sunshine might restore freshness and vitality to this languishing plant; but would the plant survive stormy wind and merciless thunder-shower?

The dealer had other protégés whose work was preparing for the annual exhibition in Trafalgar-square, and he had ample occupation during this last week. But his heart and his ambition were alike with the little tailor's boy whom he had picked up from a doorstep, and out of whom he had thought to create a Raffaele.

He went to North Audley-street on Sunday, after having sent Laurence a note offering to drive him down to the villa. He found the young man not long risen,

and dressed with a carelessness which was the very reverse of that foppish elegance which had distinguished him since his acquaintance with the Princess. Late as he had risen, there was a haggard look about his eyes that told of a sleepless night.

“*Mais, mon ami, comme tu es chiffonné ce matin !*” cried Mr. Mocatti. “*Vas t’arranger les cheveux.* But courage, *mon enfant* ; I do not come to conduct thee to the guillotine. Think that I am one of the guides who lead young genius to the Temple of Fame. Come, Laurence, thou shouldst carry thyself with the head high, my brave ; it is to-day the turning-point of thy destiny.”

With encouraging speeches of this character, and much pretence of gaiety, did Antonio Mocatti beguile the journey to Adrian’s Villa. More than one pedestrian escaped narrowly from the ravening jaws

of death during that morning's drive; for Mr. Mocatti's fluttered spirits found some relief in furious driving. There is surely in the least sensitive breast some prophetic instinct of approaching calamity. Throughout that brief journey between North Audley-street and Fulham the Neapolitan felt as if he had been carrying his protégé's coffin to its resting-place, rather than conducting the young painter to an anticipated triumph.

Madame d'Aspramonte's dining-room was crowded, and all that an erudite confectioner can do to recall the banquets of the Apollo Chamber had been done by the lady's chef in honour of this occasion. If the turbot which figured in delicate preparations of cold fish had not been caught between the two bridges that spanned the Tiber in the days of Lucullus, it was not the fault of Madame d'Aspramonte; nor

was she responsible for the bad taste of those among her guests who preferred the modern simplicity of moselle and hock to the more sophisticated charm of falernian, flavoured with rose-leaves and thickened with honey.

She moved to and fro among her visitors like a queen, receiving homage with a charming air of sovereignty. Laurence Bell's haggard face seemed strangely out of harmony with that animated crowd, made up of butterfly creatures, who asked nothing more of life than that something new in the way of amusement should be provided for them on easy terms by Madame Une-telle or Monsieur Qui-que-ce-soit.

These frivolous persons stared at Mr. Bell as at a natural curiosity, and then discoursed of his looks with one another in audible murmurs. The Princess went about among her guests pointing out the

hero of the occasion. She was not sorry that he should be thus pale and haggard, since his altered looks were a tribute to her own fascinations.

When Laurence found an opportunity to approach his patroness she was enthroned amidst a circle of her devotees. The young man surveyed that circle of unfamiliar faces with a strange sickness at heart; such a hopeless sense of his own misery and their indifference as he might have felt had he been looking down at the serried ranks of gapemouthed idlers staring up at a scaffold.

The lady sat in one of her low Roman chairs, draped like an empress, in cream-white cashmere, gorgeous with embroideries of gold. That gold-and-white drapery was only an Indian shawl; but on Giulia d'Aspramonte a shawl became a toga, and the simplest head-gear from a Bond-street mil-

liner the diadem of a Cleopatra. Never yet had this woman seemed more beautiful in the sight of her victim than to-day, when she looked up at him with a cold glitter in her eyes and a smile of ceremony on her lips.

“At last, Mr. Bell,” she said. “My friends are all impatience to behold the long-promised picture.”

The young man trifled nervously with a key hanging at his watch-chain. It was the key that opened the doors of his easel—those doors that guarded his treasure. Looking anxiously from one to another, he saw the earnest face of Sir Edgar Verbochhøeven, the great painter, and felt that here at least the brotherhood of art made a link between the anxious aspirant and the world-renowned master. Here was one who could sympathise with him in this crisis of his life.

The great painter smiled graciously as he met those appealing eyes.

Madame d'Aspramonte rose from her low seat with an air half-languid, half-impatient, as if the task to be accomplished was something of a bore, and had therefore better be despatched quickly.

"Lead the way, Mr. Bell," she said, taking the arm of an elderly diplomatist who had adored her uncomplainingly for the last ten years of his life. "Come, Sir Henry; if the picture is what a portrait should be, you will see me as I was when you first came to Rome."

"In that case I shall see Helen when first she was beheld by Paris," replied the beau; "but I hardly know whether I should care to exchange the Juno of to-day for the Helen of yesterday," he added in a softer tone.

There was a pleasing flutter of excite-

ment. Airy draperies made a faint rustling like the wings of many birds. Gigantic guardsmen pulled their mustachios, and asked one another who the fellow was that had painted Madame d'Aspramonte's portrait, and that kind of thing. Signor Mocatti pushed his arm through Mr. Bell's, and almost dragged him to the great empty room where the easel stood in solitary state.

"*Courage, ami!*" he whispered, as Laurence laid his hand on the lock of the easel.

"Courage!" repeated the painter; "yes, I have courage: I fear nothing now.—You think that I have been false to the promise that won your praise, Madame d'Aspramonte.—You think that I have belied the childish talent that inspired your hopes, Signor Mocatti. I have frittered away my time, you say; I have wasted months, and have achieved nothing. My answer is here

—here in the picture by which I mean to stand or fall."

There was a feverish gaiety in his manner. He held his head high, and met Giulia d'Aspramonte's cold eyes with looks of defiance. He was no longer the image of unrequited love, prostrate, despairing; but erect and hopeful, as the image of genius. He surveyed that mixed assembly with a proud smile, as if he would have said, "I take my stand in an enchanted region which you cannot approach, and there I have a rank that I would not exchange for dukedom or barony in the kingdom of mortals."

He turned the key in the lock, flung open the doors of the easel to their widest extent, and looked round with a glance of unconcealed triumph.

Madame d'Aspramonte and her guests crowded forward as the doors opened, the

Princess in the centre, and most eager amongst the eager. She leant forward with a coquettish smile upon her face—such a smile as she might have worn when hurrying to her glass, eager to survey the effect of some new toilette in which she was conscious of being unusually lovely.

As the eager curious faces crowded nearer to the canvas, the painter stood statue-like, confronting them with the serenity of conscious triumph.

There was a strange sudden movement among that expectant crowd—a puzzled wondering look in all the faces.

“Ah, ha!” cried the painter with rapture, “even you are surprised, Madame d’Aspramonte. You expected to see a picture, and you behold a woman, a goddess—yourself as you were in the days when your name was Heré, and your palace had its foundations on Olympus. You wonder

that art can do so much. You did not know how much could be achieved by concentration of purpose and all-absorbing intensity of thought.—See, Mocatti," he continued, seizing his patron's arm and talking to him in a low eager voice, supremely regardless of the gaping crowd always pushing forward and peering wonderingly at the canvas—"see," said the young man, indicating an outline with his extended finger—"see in what full relief the figure stands out from the background. I told you that I had not been altogether wasting my time. Ah, you will forgive me now for having done so little. You are satisfied now, are you not? Look at that pearly shoulder, with the drapery slipping off it: cannot you see the sliding motion of the heavy fabric on that smooth flesh? and the round perfect arm—do you not extend your hand involuntarily to grasp it?"

The painter paused, breathless. His passionate rhapsody was followed by a strange silence. Not a word of praise or of comment broke that unnatural stillness. Madame d'Aspramonte stood looking at the canvas with knitted brows, and a countenance expressive of mingled anger and bewilderment. The general company looked on with a vacuous stare, as not knowing what might be expected of them, and waiting, in well-bred incapacity for wonderment, the issue of affairs. Mr. Mocatti's dusky face had suddenly assumed an alarming pallor. He looked from the canvas to the painter, and from the painter back to the canvas; and the eyes of Sir Edgar Verbochhoeven followed the eyes of the dealer.

"Pray, Mr. Bell, is this a practical joke?" said the Princess at last, in tones so chilling that it seemed as if that dense silence had suddenly been cleft asunder by

the sharp edge of a sword. "I am compelled to admit that it is rather a dull piece of humour, and shall be obliged to you if you will remove your blank canvas and allow my friends to see your picture."

The painter stared at the speaker for a moment aghast, and then turned from her with a passionate gesture.

"O, Mocatti!" he cried despairingly, "her heart is harder than stone. Even my triumph cannot touch her."

He fell back a little way from the easel, and stood looking at his canvas with rapturous tenderness. Sir Edgar and Mr. Mocatti looked at each other, while the young man stood thus wrapped in a kind of ecstasy, unconscious of what was passing around him.

"Do you see anything?" asked Sir Edgar.

"Nothing," replied Mocatti. "Stay;

we may be looking at it in the wrong light."

And then, with increasing trouble of aspect, Mr. Mocatti examined the work to which his protégé had devoted so many months of his life. He looked at the canvas from the left, from the right, from above, from below, but always with the same result. The labour of those anxious days, the study of those sleepless nights, were represented by a chaos of colours heaped one upon the other in inextricable confusion—a network of lines, shapeless, intricate as the webs of a whole company of spiders.

"Look, there is something left!" cried Mocatti, suddenly pointing to a spot of luminous colour in the midst of that strange chaos of multifarious hues and conflicting lights and shadows.

A hand—the hand of a Mary Stuart or

a Countess of Blessington—peeped from out that confusion of colour, as if parting a curtain of dingy fabric; a hand that Titian might have been proud to paint—the only fragment left of that *chef-d'œuvre* which the painter had worshipped, Pygmalionwise, through so many dreary days of pain and passion. He had painted out his picture. With infinite labour, with patience that would have seemed the sublimity of heroism if attended by success, Laurence Bell had destroyed the work of his own hands, fondly believing that with every touch he was approaching nearer to the ideal perfection for which his soul longed. He had refused all counsel; he had elected to be his own adviser; and had forgotten that the eyes of genius are apt to be blinded by the supernal radiance of its own visions—that genius is all the better for a little sober counsel from common sense.

“There is a goddess behind that curtain,” cried Mocatti. “*Viens, mon ami, ne me regardes pas de cet air hébété.* Thou hast painted out thy picture—that is all! Raffaele may have done the same thing, though Vasari tells us nothing about it. Thou wilt profit by this experience, and not again make the coquette with thy pictures. Believe me, *mon ami*, one is none the worse for a practical man’s advice.”

Laurence Bell looked at his patron with the air of a man who tries in vain to grapple with some overwhelming perplexity.

“You have all conspired to fool me!” he cried passionately. “You do not know what you are doing. You do not know—”

The outburst of anger ended in a hysterical sob. Sir Edgar Verbochhoeven drew his arm through that of the young man, and pulled him gently away from amidst that circle of vacuous faces, which were

beginning to be irradiated by ironical smiles.

"Come away," he said, in a grave compassionate voice; "come with me, Mr. Bell. If you have made a *fiasco*, there is no occasion to let these people see your vexation. You will do something great before the year is out, I am sure."

They had passed through the orangery by this time, and were alone in the room beyond. Laurence Bell sank into a chair, helpless as a child, and with no more power to control his emotion.

"Look at me, Sir Edgar," he said, "and ask yourself if I shall ever paint another picture. O, you do not know what I hoped from that portrait. You do not know how hard I worked."

"You worked too hard and too continuously; you lost all sense of proportion; your ideal picture impressed itself so vividly

upon your brain, that you had no longer eyes to see the reality upon your easel. My dear Mr. Bell, you have been painting a phantom."

Laurence Bell let his head fall on the supporting arm of his consoler, and wept aloud ; and as the successful man bent over the baffled aspirant, who had fallen so ignominiously in the great race, his eyes were not undimmed by tears.

In the music-room there was considerable excitement. The butterflies gathered about the easel, and made a great fluttering with their wings as they examined the canvas on which Laurence Bell had spread layer after layer of colour. The Princess did not trouble herself to examine the object so closely. She stood a little way apart, watching the scene with an amused smile.

"Is it possible that when the young man painted *that*, he imagined himself to be painting my portrait?" she asked at last.

"It is true, madame," answered Mr. Mocatti. "The young man has achieved nothing but failure since he crossed your threshold. Your patronage has the misfortune to be fatal to genius."

"And he has painted and painted and painted all these weeks and months, and kept me for hours standing on a daïs yonder for his pleasure; and has made all this fuss and talk, and has succeeded in accomplishing only—*THAT*!" cried the Princess, pointing to the ruined canvas with ineffable disdain.

"It is unhappily the case."

"*Mais c'est pour rire pendant un mois,*" exclaimed the lady, bursting into a silvery peal of laughter; upon which there followed

a chorus, and low well-bred murmurings about the absurdity of the whole affair.

Mr. Mocatti quitted the Princess without a word ; but not without a look, which Giulia d'Aspramonte was somewhat slow to forget—so deep was the disgust, so intense the scorn expressed in that deliberate gaze.

SCENE THE FIFTH.

WHISTLED DOWN THE WIND.

“ Je pourrai te dire,
Que poursuivre l'empire, et la fortune, et l'art,
C'est folie et néant ; que l'urne aléatoire
Nous jette bien souvent la honte pour la gloire,
Et que l'on perd son âme à ce jeu de hasard ! ”

HALF-AN-HOUR after that scene in Madame d'Aspramonte's music-room that lady's guests were playing croquet on the lawn, while the mistress of the villa sat in a classic pose, with her white round arm lying along the marble balustrade against which she was seated, scarcely less massive in its modelling or less pure in its tint than the lifted arm of the statue of Artemis that gleamed white against the dark background of foliage behind the lady's chair. The

Princess had her favourite spots in the house and gardens, and knew how to select a becoming frame in which to present that most perfect of pictures—herself, as well as she knew how to choose a becoming colour, or pose herself like a statue by Praxiteles. It is astonishing how much may be accomplished by a woman gifted with some beauty, much artistic taste, and a profound confidence in her own power to charm. Be sure that some part of the magical charm that has accompanied many women through all the phases of Fate may be ascribed to the possession of this last gift. It is as necessary to the success of a Cleopatra that she should believe in her ability to subjugate the heart of Cæsar, as the confidence in his power to revolutionise an empire is necessary to a Cromwell or a Napoleon.

The croquet went on very pleasantly

among the younger and more frivolous of the visitors ; while the Princess sat with her usual circle about her, and with Herr Frolich standing by her chair, making a running commentary on the conversation of the lady's admirers.

Signor Vitzi had been invited to the villa, but had shown himself so weak as to admit a taste for croquet, in which intellectual sport he was now engaged with a young lady in apple-green muslin, much to the disgust of the Princess and to the amusement of Maximilian Frolich.

For Juno to have engaged in a chariot-race, or disputed the palm for swiftness of foot with Atalanta, would have seemed no more impossible than for Madame d'Aspramonte to have played croquet. The groups on the lawn made a pretty scene in the Watteau style ; and the Princess, in her white raiment, leaning in haughty languor

against the marble balustrade, seemed a Grecian statue newly waked to a kind of semi-vitality, and not a little disgusted to find herself among these pert Watteau damsels and fribble courtiers sporting on the lawn.

The scene in the music-room had been very displeasing to Giulia d'Aspramonte, though she had laughed the loudest at her protégé's fiasco. That the painter should stake all his fortune on one cast and lose all, and that the failure should break his heart, was a matter of the least possible importance ; but that her protégé should essay to give her loveliness its one wanting grace of immortality—that he should summon the world to behold the triumph of beauty and art, and in so doing cover himself with ridicule, and make subject-matter for a story which would be the standing joke of the season, was too much for Madame d'Aspra-

monte's patience. Some of the ridicule must necessarily fall upon her ; and this woman, who was pitiless in her contempt for her fellow-creatures, shrunk with unspeakable aversion from the idea of appearing ridiculous in their eyes.

Her feeling towards Laurence Bell was one of unmitigated anger. She had praised, she had pampered, she had boasted of him, she had staked her reputation as a connoisseur upon his genius, and this was the end ! How could she tell how much of the laughter that had resounded under the echoing roof of her music-room had been caused by the idea of her own mortification ?

For the fate of the man whose disappointment must needs be so terrible, whose humiliation must needs be so bitter, Giulia d'Aspramonte had not the faintest concern. By his failure he had placed himself outside the lady's magic circle ; and there was no-

thing left for him but to return to his native obscurity, or to die, provided always that he did not inflict the inconvenience of his death upon the household of Adrian's Villa. Madame de Maintenon used the plainest possible language when she wished the Eagle of Meaux to understand that he was not to die at Versailles ; and if the decease of a Bossuet was a nuisance not to be endured at the court of Louis, the Roman Princess could hardly be expected to tolerate any such impertinence on the part of her protégé.

She was just a little anxious as she sat in the afternoon sunlight pretending to watch the croquet-players. Mocatti had vanished, and Sir Edgar Verbochhoeven was missing from among the loungers on the terrace where she sat. Whither had Mr. Bell fled to hide his confusion ?

Herr Frolich had a knack of reading

the thoughts of Benjamin d'Aspramonte's widow.

"You are anxious about your protégé, madam," he said. "Are you afraid that he will do anything desperate under the influence of his mortification?"

"I wish to be assured that I have seen the last of him," replied the Princess. "He had become excessively wearisome; and it needed only the absurd exhibition of to-day to fill the measure of my disgust."

Sir Edgar Verbochhoeven came towards her while she was speaking.

"Where have you been hiding yourself, Sir Edgar, since the ridiculous scene of just now?"

"I saw nothing ridiculous in a scene that had all the elements of tragedy," replied the painter coldly. "I have been trying to console your protégé."

"You are very good," said the Princess with an air that implied her supreme indifference as to whether Mr. Bell was or was not consoled. She was relieved by the assurance that he had not ruptured some vessel in his foolish heart, or cut his throat, or by any other rash act prolonged the *esclandre* already caused by his folly.

"Is he gone?" she asked languidly.

"Yes, Mocatti has taken him away."

"I begin to lose faith in Signor Mocatti's protégés," said the lady.

"And in your own, Princess?" asked the painter. "I am sorry for that young man's disappointment. His picture in last year's Academy promised a great deal. He must have frittered away his time most completely since then."

Madame d'Aspramonte did not pursue the subject. The young man had left the villa. She scarcely cared to know more

than this. His share in her existence had ended. How the rest of his life was to be spent was a question beneath her consideration. She returned to the house by and by, and the afternoon party ended in music. Carlo Vitzi sang his airiest barcarolles and sweetest serenades. Herr Frolich played some of his grandest sonatas ; and, encouraged by these professional performers, the amateur tenors and buffos and sopranos and pianists pranced gaily on their *chevaux de bataille*.

“ Why, let the stricken deer go weep,
The hart ungallèd play :
For some must watch, while others sleep ;
So runs the world away.”

Was it to be supposed that Madame d'Aspramonte's afternoon party must close in confusion and dismay, because a foolish young man had broken his heart?

SCENE THE SIXTH.

TARDY REPENTANCE.

"Once she was dear ; now she was all I had
To love in human life."

AFTER that terrible awakening Laurence Bell faced his destiny with a calmness that was almost heroic. It seemed as if all the wildness and the fever had departed together with that phantasmal image of his own thoughts, which had melted into thin air before the cold gaze of common eyes, as the elfin maidens of German fairy lore vanish from the Wunderberg at the first chill glimmer of day.

Antonio Mocatti found the young man sitting very quietly, with Sir Edgar Verbochhoeven by his side.

"I have been telling Mr. Bell that the

success of the future may make him forget to-day's disappointment," said the kindly painter.

"And I have been telling Sir Edgar that there is no such thing as the future for me," added Laurence very quietly. "Have those people left the room where the—where it is?" he asked of Mocatti.

The word "picture" had been upon his lips, but he substituted the vague pronoun. Was he not speaking of a monster—a shapeless creature which had no name?

"Yes; they are in the garden."

"Let me go back to that room. I want to see how complete my madness has been."

They allowed him to return, and to look at his ruined work with the eyes that had been so rudely opened.

"Yes, I suppose I have destroyed her," he said, looking with despairing eyes at that which should have been a picture.

"I still see that radiant face smiling at me. And you tell me that it is not there? It is only a dream; a dream which I have dwelt upon so fondly that it has grown a part of my brain—more real to me than the earth on which I stand. But I tell you that underneath that wasted labour there is a goddess. She is there—buried by the toil of all those weary days. O, Mocatti, it is almost too bitter to bear. A few careless hours produced a picture that won me immediate notice, and for my thought and labour of many months I reap only humiliation. I am a child playing at being a painter; a madman pleased with the image of his own disordered brain; a dupe—and the lowest of dupes, the dupe of my own folly."

For a moment despair and passion had the mastery over him; but he controlled himself, and the brief outburst of passion

was succeeded by that calmness which had surprised the anxious Mocatti. Laurence Bell locked the doors of the easel, and handed the key to his patron.

“You will show your protégés that canvas when they aspire to ideal perfection,” he said.

“I will show it them as a warning against the influence of Madame d’Aspramonte,” answered the Neapolitan ; “that is the fever which has disordered your brain, *mon ami*. We will try to find the antidote, now that we have been all but killed by the poison.”

Mr. Mocatti had the easel conveyed to his own house in a cab, while he drove Laurence Bell back to town in his phaeton. The painter allowed his patron to do what he pleased with him, and even affected a certain air of cheerfulness. Of the two men, the dealer seemed the more depressed

by the events of that day. It might seem little that a young man should spoil his pet picture ; but there was something in the painter's face which told Mr. Mocatti there were but few more pictures to be painted on this earth by the hand of Laurence Bell.

The bells were ringing for evening service as the dealer's steppers tore Londonwards. The spring evening was bright and warm, and the Park and streets gay with that smartly-dressed holiday crowd which to the mind distracted by its own galling grief has such an air of unreality.

Mr. Mocatti drove across the Park to Cumberland-gate, and thence to Wigmore-street.

"Where are you taking me?" Laurence asked languidly.

"To the place from which I ought never to have lured you," answered the dealer. "I tempted you away from your

best friends; I am going to take you back to them."

"My friends!" gasped the painter.
"Where—what friends?"

"I am going to take you back to Tom Graystone and his daughter."

"No, Mocatti," cried Laurence resolutely; "I left them when I was successful; I will not go back to them now I have failed. No; I have not sunk low enough for that."

"You will go back to them," answered the dealer coolly, "because you are ill, very ill, *mon enfant*,—and if you do not have friendship, and pity, and the tenderness of an innocent woman, you will die. You have been breathing the air of the great Dismal Swamp—where, among such flowers and luxuriance of foliage as would seem to belong to Paradise, there is the poisoned atmosphere of the bottomless pit. *J'ai beau*

te prêcher la morale, n'est-ce pas, after what I have said to thee in the past. I was wrong, all wrong. The influence of your Princess has been fatal—poisonous. The antidote to that poison is to be found in the friendship of Amy Graystone. Do you think she will not open her arms to receive thee? If Divinity rejoices over the repentant sinner, shall not woman shed tears of rapture when the wanderer returns to her?"

"I will never go back to her."

"Bah! thou knowest not the sex. *Ces blanches filles aux cheveux cendrés sont fait pour tout pardonner. C'est leur métier ici bas.*"

The chestnut steppers were nearing Charnock-street by this time. The gray dulness of the old quarter seemed to bring with it a sense of repose to the mind of Laurence Bell. They were not fair to look upon, those dingy streets, those smoke-



blackened balconies that had once been green, those dirty flights of steps on which infantine squatters lingered to rest, those darksome areas at whose gates the potboy or the milkman loitered for pleasant chat with that willing slattern who has "maid-of-all-work" written across her grimy brow. These things were not beautiful; but they spoke to Laurence Bell of a peace which he had never known in that brilliant western world on the other side of Oxford-street.

He made no further attempt to oppose his Mentor. With the thought of the woman he had abandoned, there arose in his mind the vision of a consoling angel bending over a bed of rest. Was it not rest, and rest only, for which he yearned now that the fever-dream of his life was over?—to hear Amy Graystone's gentle voice once more, to feel the soft touch of that caressing hand; to lie on the old homely chintz-

covered sofa in the Charnock-street parlour, and to be lulled to sleep by the sound of those plaintive German waltzes she played so sweetly? Ah, if it were but possible—if, in the infinite compassion of a woman's breast, there might be forgiveness and pity for such as he! His heart grew cold with a vague terror as he approached the familiar street; but stronger even than that terror was the hope that he might be forgiven, the yearning for sympathy and consolation.

Had his old love come back to him all on a sudden? cries the reader. Out upon such falsehood to nature! No, reader; the Amy Graystone of his bright young dreams, the fair girl who was to have been his bride, was not she whom Laurence Bell so languished to behold; it was Amy the consoler, the pitying angel, the sister of charity, for whose presence his soul hungered. The roads of life all lead towards one goal, and

there is no such thing as going backward on those mysterious pathways. Love was dead in the breast of the painter; the passion, the fever, the tempestuous feeling that had been inspired by a wicked woman, had worn themselves out. The touch of an icy hand had been laid upon the burning brain, paralysing its force, extinguishing its fire. Laurence Bell thought of his ambition and his love as of things that belonged to the past.

“How I loved that woman, Mocatti!” he said; “how I believed in that picture! It was all a dream. I look back and wonder at my folly.”

They were before Tom Graystone’s old house by this time. Mr. Mocatti and Laurence Bell alighted, and the elder gentleman sounded a thundering summons upon Mr. Graystone’s portal, while the unapproachable groom paraded the chestnuts

to and fro to the admiration of Charnock-street.

The house had been always dingy of aspect, in common with all other habitations in that darksome district; but it is not in the nature of a good woman to leave any dwelling-place she occupies unbrightened by those little touches of feminine adornment that go some way to redeem its ugliness. Amy had hung caged singing-birds in the parlour-windows, and had made the apartment rural with floral decoration in the way of geranium and mignonette. The birds and the geraniums had been the occupation of the young lady's morning hours, after the all-important question of dinner had been duly discussed and decided in solemn counsel with the friendly old cook and housekeeper who had "done for" Mr. Graystone since his daughter's childhood. Laurence had wasted many a sunny half-

hour very pleasantly while assisting in the cultivation of the geraniums, or administering to the necessities of the birds; and his heart grew chill to-day when he saw that the birds had disappeared, and that all the bright flowers Amy had tended so carefully were now represented by one withered geranium, black, dry, and leafless as some storm-blasted oak.

This neglect seemed like a reproach to the remorseful soul of the painter. Ah, what sorrow there must have been in that house before the flowers faded and died, and the old pleasant attendance on the pet birds became a trouble too great to be borne! What a story of desolation was told by that one withered geranium!

Mr. Mocatti had to repeat his summons before the door was opened, and Laurence Bell had ample leisure to scrutinise the exterior of that house which had so long been

his home. Everywhere the stamp of desolation was visible. The steps were dirty—those steps whereon Betsy, the faithful housekeeper, had loved to lavish her morning labours. Vagrant morsels of straw and scraps of waste-paper, gaudy fragments of posters torn from a neighbouring hoarding, littered the threshold ; a vagabond artist had chalked youth's conventional ideal of mankind upon the door—a creature with a frying-pan for a head and toasting-forks for extremities. Ah, what a painful thing it is to go back to any familiar place after many months of utter severance from its inhabitants! What vague fears, what shapeless terrors, crowd into the mind of the returning wanderer as he nears the threshold!

At last there sounded a step in the passage—not Betsy's familiar footstep, brisk and cheery of sound, but the feeble slippered shuffle of slattern age. Then came

a clanking of chains and withdrawing of bolts ; and the two men looked at each other—Mr. Mocatti vexed and disappointed, Laurence with unspeakable terrors in his face.

“They are out of town,” said the dealer.
“*Tu voilà tout interdit. C'est un peu mal à propos, j'en conviens.* If the patriarch had been away from his tents when the returning prodigal came home, who shall say that the prodigal would not have gone back to his bad ways? Life is at best but a question of opportunity.”

The door was opened while Mr. Mocatti moralised, and a grimy old woman peered out at the visitors.

“Mr. Graystone is out of town?” said the dealer.

“Yes, sir; he's been away these many months.”

“Indeed!”

"Yes, sir. He went afore Christmas. His daughter's 'elth was so bad, you see, sir; and the doctor, he say as she must go somewheres where it was warmer like, which they went to the Isle of Wight."

Laurence was ghastly pale when his Mentor turned to look at him.

"Miss Graystone was ill, then?" said Mocatti.

"Yes, sir; she enjoyed very pore 'elth. The doctors do say as she's in a declined; and Mr. Graystone he was dreadful cut up about it. So they went off somewheres in the Isle of Wight, and Betsy with them; which you may remember Betsy, sir, as was Mr. Graystone's housekeeper."

"Do you know if Miss Graystone has recovered?" asked Laurence; "if—if her health is better than when she left town?"

"I do not, sir," answered the slattern, who had been adjusting her dingy cap and

smoothing her grimy apron, as if she would fain have modified the shortcomings of her attire even at this last moment. "You see, sir, I have kep' the house while Mr. Graystone have been away; which I do it for the sake of house-rent, my husband being in the perlece, and his beat lyin' this way. But I have heard nothink of Mr. Graystone nor the young lady since they left, only I should think if she had got well, they'd have come home before now; which I know Mr. Graystone didn't intend to stop away anythink like so long as he have stopped."

This was all the custodian of the house could communicate. She did not know Mr. Graystone's address. No letters ever came for him, and she had found no occasion to write to him. But Mr. Mocatti assured Laurence that he would find out the address before noon next day.

"I know plenty of Tom Graystone's friends," he said. "We'll run down to the Island to-morrow afternoon."

"I should like to look round the parlour," Mr. Bell said, with an appealing glance at his patron.

The woman unlocked the door, and the two men went into the room. The dust was lying thick on the familiar furniture, so unutterably shabby and common after the classic splendours of Adrian's Villa. There was the little piano on which Amy had played; by which he had sat so often in the twilight, at peace with himself and the world, rich in hope and ambition, richer in the consciousness that he was beloved.

And he had exchanged all this—for what? For a brief intoxication, a too transient enchantment; for the privilege of lying at the feet of a cruel goddess, to

do homage to the beauty that was unattainable as the glory of the stars.

It was over. He had awakened from the dream; but he was no nearer to the peace of those calm waking hours that had gone before it. The dram-drinker may discover the poisonous influence of his fiery liquors, and may confess with shame-bowed head that it is a foolish thing to be a drunkard; but can he go back to the cool syllabubs and home-made wines of his boyhood? Ah no; the sense to which these innocent things were pleasant has been lost for ever. The lava-flood has swept over the mountain, and the flowers may bloom there never more.

“Miss Graystone took her birds away with her?” Laurence asked, looking at the nails on which the cages had been wont to hang.

“No, sir ; miss gave the canary and

the linnet to a young friend before she left. She said as they'd be well cared for."

"And the flowers that used to be in the windows?"

"She give them away too, sir, to another young persing; and a many books and drorings, and such-like. She give 'em away to two or three young persings as had been her companions."

It was a small thing that Amy Graystone should have made a few little presents to her friends before she left London; but in the mind of Laurence Bell the circumstance took a sinister meaning. Was not this giving away of pet birds and flowers, favourite books and little girlish treasures, a kind of farewell to life? Did it not suggest the idea that Amy Graystone must have fancied this leave-taking to be a final one?

Laurence said as much to Mr. Mocatti

while that gentleman was driving him to North Audley-street.

“*Que de bêtises !*” cried the dealer.
“*Cette jeunesse* suffers a little because one quits her, and one thinks that she must die. One has but to follow her and to tell her one repents oneself, and Tom Graystone may give the doctors their *congé*.”

SCENE THE SEVENTH.

IN THE CHURCHYARD.

“ Si tu veux du repos, si tu cherches de l'ombre,
Ta couche est prête, accours ! loin du bruit on y dort.
Si ton fragile esquif lutte sur la mer sombre,
Viens, c'est ici l'écueil ; viens, c'est ici le port ! ”

MR. MOCATTI and his protégé started for Portsmouth at noon on the following day. The dealer, who knew almost everybody worth knowing in London, had very little difficulty in discovering the whereabouts of Thomas Graystone. A reliable informant assured him that the painter was to be found at Bonchurch ; and Antonio Mocatti pledged himself to conduct Laurence Bell with all possible expedition to the feet of the woman he had wronged.

There were no more symptoms of opposition on the part of the painter himself.

The pride which had made him recoil from the idea of reconciliation yesterday had no part in his mind to-day. He languished for the presence of Amy Graystone more ardently than in the days when her image had mixed itself with every vision of the future. All the infamy of his past conduct came home to him with redoubled force, now that he had escaped from the fatal enchantment in which Giulia d'Aspramonte held the souls of her slaves. He longed to acknowledge his remorse, and to implore pardon.

The world, which knew Mr. Mocatti only as the trader and the speculator, would have wondered to behold him watching over and sustaining his broken-down protégé during that journey to the Isle of Wight.

Laurence Bell had need of a stronger will than his own to sustain him in this extremity. Eager as he was to see Amy Graystone, he would have turned back before the end of the journey, if Mr. Mocatti had not been at hand to ridicule his fears, and to rekindle the feeble spark of hope that was perpetually being extinguished in his dejected soul.

The midday express carried the travellers to Portsmouth at the usual high-pressure rate. There was little delay at the Southsea Pier, and it was still quite early in the afternoon when the two men stood on the deck of the steamer looking out over a sunlit sea. There is no better consoler than the Ocean, when her pure breath and melody-breathing voice come freshly on the travel-worn wanderer. Even Laurence Bell's drooping spirits revived somewhat under that soothing influence.

He leant against the bulwarks, and looked out over the dancing waters, above which the coast rose bright with spring verdure, gay with white-walled villas and floating pennants. The boat skimmed the buoyant waves with a motion light and swift as a sea-bird. Never had boat sailed so fast since man first built himself a home upon the waters ; so, at least, it seemed to Laurence Bell. He was near his old friends now. Ah, how would they look upon him in his hour of remorse ? Was there any hope of pardon and pity ? Alas for him, the fatal glamour hung about him even yet ; even yet, when his meeting with Amy Graystone appeared only a question of so many minutes—even now, while the winds and waters were carrying him to Amy, his soul went back to that fatal enchantress whose wiles had wrought his ruin.

“ Do you think she will be sorry

for my failure, Mocatti?" he asked suddenly.

"Do I think Miss Graystone will be sorry for your failure? But yes; is it not in her nature to be sorry for everything that afflicts you?"

"Will Giulia d'Aspramonte be sorry?" said Laurence impatiently. "It was of her I was speaking."

"Then do not speak to me the name of that woman again. Will she be sorry! Are the cockatrices sorry when their looks are death to poor little feeble sparrows? Is the laughing-hyæna sorry for the foolish lamb, whose bones she comes to pick? Nature makes treachery and cruelty innate in these creatures, and why not sometimes in men and women? In the piece of mechanism that Madame d'Aspramonte calls her heart there are no springs that move in sympathy with the sufferings

of other people. *Cette femme souffre lorsqu'elle s'aperçoit d'une petite ride de plus au front; mais elle n'est pas le moins du monde émue de la mort d'un homme."*

The boat was grinding against the out-works of Ryde Pier by this time. Mr. Mocatti and his companion disembarked, and made their way straight to the end of the pier, where the dealer chartered the best two-horse fly procurable at five minutes' notice; and after a delay only sufficient for the consumption of seltzer-and-brandy on the part of that gentleman, whose braided coat and general splendour of appearance struck awe into the minds of all beholders, the travellers started for Bonchurch.

There was little talk between the two men during that hurried drive through the pleasant silvan country, where all the hedges were bright with young leaves, and the air perfumed with wild spring-flowers.

Laurence grew feverishly anxious as the dreaded and yet desired meeting came nearer and nearer. Mr. Mocatti had enough to do to watch the face of his protégé, with doubt and misgiving.

Had his young Raffaele indeed withered and perished utterly amid that Malström of passion into whose deadly circle the dealer himself had precipitated him ?

“Has that woman lost me my Raffaele for always ?” he said to himself. “Ah, no ; I will not believe it. Was there ever the man yet who died for the love of woman ? No ; a thousand times no. Men have died, and worms have eaten them ; *mais l’amour n’y est pour rien dans l’affaire.* My Laurence will see *cette jeunesse.* *Il y aura une scène larmoyante, et puis les noces.* He will be a citizen, and pay taxes, and eat butcher’s meat, and become the father of children with dirty noses. Ah, great

Heaven ! why must the nose of infancy be always thus dirty ? He will not be the great inspired creature I have dreamed of, to earn me twenty thousand pounds by a single picture. He will not go up into the skies with Gretchen, or descend into the shades with Faust ; but he will paint me boilers of pots, and scenes from his English Williams, and his Abbé of Wakefield, and his Bride of Kenilworth ; and I will be content. Ah, let me but see the life-blood come back to his poor pallid cheeks, the force return to his attenuated limbs, and I will be content ; for I am foolish enough to feel, in some kind, the love of a father for this young imbecile."

Thus ran the thoughts of Mr. Mocatti as the flyman drove his horses along the narrow dusty roads, alighting every now and then when the hills were steep to lead his obedient animals. The outlines of budding oak and bursting elm, hillside and

[illegible]

She was a *Bomburum* by this time. The long groves of evergreens, the glistening of ocean, the many cliffs and verdant glades were extremely beautiful to the eyes of men who had not loved the wild nature in no wilder or grander form than she assumes in Hyde Park.

The delicious calm of the country, the feast of colour, the divine purity of the atmosphere, were delightful to the weary soul of Laurence Bell, and he must have been something less than a true artist if he had not been able to lose all sense of his own sorrows, and even of his own identity, in the rapturous contemplation of that lovely scene. For a moment at least the divinity of the universe held all his senses by its spell; for a moment he was a thorough Pantheist, and it was sufficient happiness to be an atom in this wonderful world of light and colour.

Mr. Mocatti watched his companion's altered face as the two men strolled away from the hotel where they had left their vehicle, and where the dealer had given his orders about dinner, with all other orders necessary for the comfort of himself and his protégé. At this early period of the year

there were only a few quiet invalids at Bonchurch, and there was ample accommodation for the new-comers.

“Come, then,” cried the enthusiastic Mocatti, “thou art better already, my Laurence. I see the healthy flesh-tints coming back—if ever so little—to thy poor pallid cheeks, and I am content. Thou wilt leave off to cough that little dry hacking cough which excruciates me the nerves. Thou wilt find thy Amy, and all will be well.”

“Let us go at once to look for her,” said Laurence. “You cannot tell how I dread meeting those two people, even while I am languishing for the moment of our meeting.”

“We will find them after we have dined,” answered Mocatti, becoming suddenly practical; “thou art too weak and too nervous to bear more excitement just yet. Thou shalt see thy friends after that thou

hast taken the wing of a chicken and half a bottle of Manzanilla. Be sure the prodigal stopped to eat a handful of dates, or to drink a draught of the *vin du pays*, before his father saw him afar off."

Laurence pleaded hard for an immediate visit to Mr. Graystone's abode; but Mocatti was inexorable. And as the painter did not know the address of his old master's lodging, he was fain to submit.

"*Nous irons flâner pour un petit quart d'heure*, while that they prepare us the dinner," said the dealer. "We will go and look at the church. It is all near, and it is one of the spectacles of the place. Thou wilt use it for a background in a *tableau de genre*—two young girls in black, who kneel upon a new-made grave, in lifting the eyes to heaven—one of those pictures they call 'goody,' and which sell—ah, how they sell!—or an old man contemplative. But look,

le voilà, the very man ; the head bowed, as with grief ; the hands clasped ; the air distracted. *Il se pose comme exprès."*

They were standing at the gate of the churchyard, and from that spot they beheld a figure, which in its pose and surroundings might indeed have made the subject of a picture.

It was the figure of an elderly man, who stood in a meditative attitude, looking down at a new-made grave. His elbow rested on a moss-grown headstone by the side of that patch of fresh turf, and he was standing with his back to the two men at the gate. In one idle hand a garland of wild spring-flowers, wood-anemones and violets, hung loosely, and in that listless hand and in the posture of the drooping head the universal language of sorrow told a story that goes home to all hearts. Even the worldly Neapolitan was touched a little by this picture.

“Is it not strange, then, that in a world where there is such sorrow as that, there can exist a woman cold and hard like Giulia d’Aspramonte?—a woman who has something under the left ribs that moves with a measured pulsation, but who has no sense or sentiment in common with the people who suffer as that old man yonder suffers. What would a new-made grave be to that woman? So much discoloured turf. And she was born like that, Laurence Bell. She jilted me at seventeen years of age, and laughed in my face when she saw my sorrow. Bah! why do I harp upon her thus? *Elle ne vaut pas la peine que je la déteste.*”

Mr. Mocatti gave himself a little impatient shrug, as if he would fain have shaken off all recollection of Madame d’Aspramonte. Unhappily these grand Juno-like creatures, with flashing Italian eyes, have a terrible power over the hearts of

weak mankind. What is it, that subtle influence, so undefinable, so irresistible? It cannot surely be love; for that is a sentiment which involves higher and purer feelings than can ever be awakened in the breast of man by such a woman as Giulia d'Aspramonte.

Is this power animal magnetism or witchcraft? It must needs be one or the other.

The dealer opened the gate, and he and Laurence Bell went into the churchyard. They had occasion to pass that solitary mourner by the new-made grave, and they went softly, inspired with an instinctive respect by the aspect of sorrow. Quietly as they both walked, their footsteps sounded in the stillness of the place, and the mourner started from his reverie and turned to look at them.

The mourner was Tom Graystone. For

some moments he stood looking at them in a strange dreamy way, almost as if he had been trying to recall their faces, or to remember when and where he had seen them before. While he contemplated the intruders thus, like a sleep-walker too suddenly recalled to the waking world, Laurence Bell and his companion stood before him transfixed. The countenances of both were impressed with an undefined terror; but the painter's face was like the face of the dead.

The silence was not of long duration. After that brief pause of surprise and bewilderment, Tom Graystone sprang towards his old pupil with a cry of rage.

"You here!" he gasped—"you! O God, it needed only this!"

"Mr. Graystone, I come to be forgiven."

"Forgiven! Do you come here to insult me—to insult my daughter—to profane the resting-place of the dead?"

"The dead!" cried Laurence Bell, falling on his knees beside the new-made grave.

What need had he to question the mourner? His guilty conscience told him who lay beneath that spot of earth. Was there any possible loss which could affect Thomas Graystone so keenly, except the loss of his only child?

Mr. Mocatti was not slow to grasp the significance of that scene. He felt that the situation was one in which he was eminently *de trop*.

"The poor old man has good reason to be angry with me for my share in this business," he said to himself. "*Je m'effaceraï.*"

He did not go far, but waited discreetly outside the little churchyard until his protégé should appear.

"*C'est assez ennuyant,*" he reflected.

"*La poverina* might have been the young man's redeeming angel; and nothing would do for her but she must die."

While the dealer paced slowly to and fro, keeping guard over the gate of the churchyard, Laurence Bell knelt by that nameless grave, where the turf still bore the impress of the gravedigger's handiwork. His face was hidden in his hands, and he was sobbing like a child.

Tom Graystone watched him with angry eyes. Was he to pity this traitor and renegade because he shed a few weak tears at the sight of the ruin he had wrought? Was he to forgive the wretch who had blighted his darling's life because he came to make a tragical scene beside her grave? These tears might be the scalding drops of real anguish, or the formula of hypocrisy; this repentance, might be real or unreal. This was a question which Thomas Gray-

stone did not trouble himself to consider. What did it matter? The tears could not touch the unconscious dead. The repentance that came so late was worse than mockery.

“My daughter was six months dying, Laurence Bell,” cried the old man in a cold hard voice. “You have managed matters very carefully so as to escape her reproaches; but wouldn’t it have been as well to stay away altogether? She only died on Thursday week.”

“I came to ask her forgiveness—to tell her what misery my madness had brought upon me. I came because I feel that the hand of death is on me; and I had nothing to ask except her forgiveness—no afterthought, no hope but that. I have played my life, and lost it. I came to acknowledge my folly. O God!” cried the young man, starting to his feet with a sudden

wildness of manner, "can she be really dead? Is this some trick you are playing upon me—some vengeance you have planned? If it is so, take care how you inflict this torture upon me. The distance between me and madness is a very narrow one. I tell you to be careful, Mr. Graystone. It is a dangerous thing to trifle with a desperate man. I will not believe that she is dead. I will not believe that I am too late."

"A little more than one week too late, Mr. Bell!" answered Thomas Graystone, as utterly unmoved by the painter's passion as he had been by the despair that preceded it. "It is nearly a year since you turned your back on me and my daughter. There might have been some period during that year in which your repentance would not have been too late. I saw my child die, Laurence Bell; I saw her die—inch by inch—and you were the sole cause of her

death. From the hour in which you left us, to follow your Italian adventuress, my daughter faded. Great Heaven, how patient she was!—how bravely she bore her martyrdom!—how nobly she struggled—for my sake! I knew it all; and there were times in which I could have come to you to beseech your return—to beg as a favour that you would condescend to come back and assume your old position as my daughter's suitor. And *you* know how from the first I had set my face against my dear one's engagement. I should have come to you—yes, Laurence Bell, I should have come to supplicate your pity for my child—if I had not known how useless my degradation would have been.”

“O, if you had but come!” said Laurence, with a sigh that was almost a groan.

“*If* I had come—what then? I should have found you at the feet of that woman.

I had the means of knowing your mode of life; and I knew that you were a slave, a willing slave, a besotted wretch, who had no desire to shake off his vile bondage. Would you have forsaken your Italian patroness to return to my daughter? No, Mr. Bell, you would not—and you know that you would not. Why are you here to-day? What brought you to this place? Was it because your heart yearned for my poor child? No; you came *because that other woman has done with you*. Ah, Mr. Bell, your face tells me I have hit the truth. A word from that woman, and you would go back to her—without stopping to ask if my poor girl forgave you before she died.”

After this there came a silence. Laurence Bell seemed stricken with a kind of numbness. He stood looking down at the grave, trying to realise the sense of his loss.

"I cannot speak of her," he gasped, in a choking voice; "I cannot understand. I—O God, is it true? Have I killed her?"

"As surely as ever there was murder done upon this earth since Cain slew his brother. She forgave you, and spoke of you with all her old sweetness. God may forgive you by and by, if there is any truth in your repentance; but do not ask forgiveness of me."

These were the last words spoken by Thomas Graystone to his old pupil. He knelt by the grave, and laid down his garland of wood-anemones and violets with a gentle hand. It was the nearest approach to a caress which he could now give to her who had been the one dear delight of his life for more than nineteen years. He lingered a few moments, looking tenderly down at the flowers, and then went quietly

away by another gate than that near which Mr. Mocatti waited for his protégé.

The dealer lost patience altogether, at last, after having waited for nearly an hour. He shrunk with a keen sense of shame from any encounter with the father of that gentle girl whose happiness he had plotted to destroy; and he scarcely cared to reënter the churchyard unless assured that Mr. Graystone had quitted it. But after looking at his watch, and finding how long he had been waiting, Mr. Mocatti took courage, and went with cautious footsteps to reconnoitre.

No sound of voices greeted his ear as he approached the spot where Amy Graystone lay buried. The stillness sent a chill to his heart. The sense of his own iniquity had suddenly become very oppressive to this worldling's soul. Was there to be no end to the consequences of his little stroke of

diplomacy, his clever little plan for developing to the utmost the genius of his protégé? Was there to be no limit to the mischief he had done so unwittingly?

He found Laurence Bell prostrate upon the new-made grave, and his first thought was one of unspeakable horror. He thought the chord had snapped, and that the earthly career of his protégé had ended upon a woman's grave.

It was not so. The young man rose at the sound of his Mentor's voice, and stood before him pallid as death itself, but very quiet.

"Is this your work or mine, Mocatti?" he said, in a low hoarse voice. "I think I should have been true to her, and happy with her, if you had let me alone. But I don't know; it may have been in my nature to be false. Come, let us get back to Ryde."

“Back to Ryde! What for?”

“To catch the next boat for Portsmouth.”

“You want to go back to town?”

“Yes; at once.”

“But why, then? I brought you away from London chiefly because you want rest. Do you think you have any less need of rest after the shock of this bad news? Come, *mon ami*, we will go back to the hotel. A spoiled dinner is better than no dinner. *Tu es pâle comme un mort. Courage, courage, ami!* she was always *poitrineuse*, this poor young girl. *N'est-ce pas que je te l'ai dit souvent autrefois?* It is not for thee to reproach thyself because she has died young. Come!”

“And you think that I will stay in this place, Mocatti—in this place, where the very sky and sea talk to me of my misery? No; I must go back—immediately.”

"For what?"

"I have business in London—important business."

"What kind of business?"

"That is no question for you."

"But yes, it is a question for me, and a question that I will ask till I have had your answer. Have I not given myself trouble enough about you in running this way and that way like a man distraught? Have I not made a sacrifice of myself and my own interests in order to watch you and to take care of you; and am I to be kept at arm's-length, after all? I demand to know your business in town."

"I want to see that woman. I want to tell her what she has done."

"And do you think that she will care? Do you think that—you, who know her?"

"I do not ask myself that," answered Laurence, speaking with unwonted rapidity

in the fever and hurry that had taken possession of him. "She shall know what she has done; she shall be told the nature of her work. She shall be told of my disgust, my loathing; the poisonous hatred which her infamy inspires in my breast."

"And again I ask you, do you think she will care? Imbecile, have you yet to know that those things are her triumphs? A young girl broken-hearted; a father's hairs grown prematurely white; a mad passionate fool beating out his brains in a savage rage against her cruelty—what are these except an ovation the more offered to her beauty? You shall not go to see that woman; you shall not go fresh from this grave to her presence."

It was not without very considerable difficulty that Mr. Mocatti succeeded in persuading Laurence Bell to abandon his design of starting immediately on the re-

turn journey. He did succeed at last, however; but he saw that it was rather because Laurence was utterly worn out and helpless than because he was consentient.

They went back to the hotel, where Mr. Mocatti dined very miserably on lukewarm chicken and tepid asparagus, while Laurence sat by a window looking out into vacancy. After dinner, the young man retired to his room, and the dealer went out alone to walk by the sea, and to meditate upon the perplexities of existence.

“How should I know that I had to deal with such people?” he said to himself, as he reviewed his intercourse with his protégé, and repented of the evil he had done. “Was not I jilted by that woman, and my heart as near breaking as it is in the nature of ordinary hearts? and am I any the worse for what I suffered at her hands? But I part these two foolish creatures, and be-

hold, one breaks her heart and dies outright, and the other goes distraught and can paint me no more pictures. I try to kindle a fire, and I set loose an imprisoned volcano; and then I ask myself how could I have foreseen so much mischief?"

Musing thus, Antonio Mocatti spent a very miserable evening, regardless of all the glory and beauty of sky and ocean. He went to the painter's room early next morning, anxious to see what soothing influence a night's rest might have exercised upon the troubled brain.

The bird had flown. A line—blotted and blurred as only the hand of the writer whose brain is distracted blots and blurs the paper it travels over—told him that Laurence Bell was on his way to London.

"I shall not go near *her*," he wrote. "You are right; she would not care. What is it to her, who has no heart, that the

hearts of others should suffer or should break? I am going back to town, because I cannot endure to inhabit the place that holds Amy Graystone's grave, and because I want to get to my work.

"Do not give yourself any further concern about me, Mocatti; you shall not hear of me again till I have returned to my old habits of industry. I shall go straight to the lodgings at Notting-hill, and will send for you as soon as I have anything on my easel."

"He is trying to throw dust in my eyes," cried the infuriated Mocatti; "he has gone back to London to see that woman."

SCENE THE EIGHTH.

A BLANK.

"Lui, que deviendra-t-il ?—Il sera temps qu'il meure !"

LAURENCE BELL hurried back to town as fast as steamboat and express-train could convey him thither ; but he did not go to Madame d'Aspramonte. He went to North Audley-street, collected his goods and chattels, put them into a cab, and drove straight to the lodging taken for him by Mr. Mocatti—the dismal, comfortless first-floor over the emporium of a despondent chemist.

Here the young man fell ill, and lay prostrate for upwards of a fortnight under the influence of a low fever. Mr. Mocatti

came to him during this illness, and took care that he should have tender nursing and able medical advice.

The fever was conquered, and Laurence rose from his sick-bed the merest shadow of the hopeful young painter whose *Lady Macbeth* had won him a short-lived renown. He was weaker than a child, and he suffered from a little hacking cough, which made Mr. Mocatti shudder ; but his sight was improved by the enforced idleness of his illness, and he was just able to stand before his easel for two or three hours a day, with intervals of rest. He had been strangely eager to return to his work, and he worked quietly and laboriously, with none of the old fervour, but with a patient industry, a tranquil bearing-up against bodily weakness and pain that was almost heroic.

“ I want to pay you the money I borrowed, Mocatti,” he said. “ You have been

very good to me ; and I don't want you to be a loser by your confidence in me."

"Good to thee !" cried the dealer. "Nay, have I not been well-nigh thy ruin ? *Peste soit de cet argent !* Do you think I am so greedy of gold that I cannot wait for my due ? If thou wouldst only be reasonable, Laurence, and go to the sea-side to get strong again, we should live to see thee the modern Raffaele, in spite of all."

"No, Mocatti," Laurence answered quietly ; "you and I both know better than that. The future is measured for me. There are two things I have to do before I die : I want to pay my debts, and to erect a marble cross—pure and white as her fair young soul—above the spot where Amy Graystone lies."

Mr. Mocatti elevated his shoulders with a despairing shrug.

"*A la bonheur !*" said he ; "thou must

please thyself. Promise me but one thing —thou wilt never again seek to see Giulia d'Aspramonte."

"No. Why should I seek her, except to reproach her? And you say rightly; she would not be touched or pained by my reproaches. They would be only flatteries in disguise. I daresay she has forgotten my existence by this time. No, I will not go near her."

"*C'est convenu, cela?*"

"Yes."

"*Touchez-là,*" said the dealer, offering his hand with unusual solemnity.

He went away tolerably satisfied, but not quite at ease with regard to his protégé. The doctor had told him that if Laurence Bell would live quietly and steadily for a while, carefully avoiding all emotion, there was just a chance for his life; but it was only a chance at the best, and it was a

chance which would be destroyed by any imprudence on the part of the patient.

“I doubt myself of him,” mused Mr. Mocatti. “He pretends to forget that woman; but has he really ceased to think of her? It is only too easy to be unfaithful to a good woman; but can the man who has once loved a bad woman ever teach himself to forget her?”

For some weeks Laurence Bell toiled with unabating patience, and during that period his health underwent some slight improvement. The cough became a little less troublesome, the pain in the side less acute. The spring days lengthened with the approach of summer, and the croquet-players were noisy in all the squares and public gardens of Notting-hill. Ah, how the sound of the balls brought back the memory of last summer's frivolous delights

to Laurence Bell ! He could see the croquet-players on the lawn at Adrian's Villa, and could fancy himself standing behind Giulia d'Aspramonte's chair under the solemn cedars, talking to her while the foolish ones played in that sunlit foreground. The odour of her perfumed hair, the low legato tones of her voice, came back to him with all the lazy delights of those long summer afternoons. They came back to him as the pictures of a past life flash before the eyes of a drowning man ; they came back to him as the rapture of that hour in which he lay at Mary's feet for the first time, singing some languorous love-song, must have come back to Rizzio when the mailed hand of Ruthven gripped him in the gripe of death.

No pen of mine can describe the bitterness of those early summer days to the mind of this man, who had lost everything. He had lost everything—the hope of fame, the

love of a pure and faithful heart, the esteem of good men—even the favour of that false siren at whose feet he had laid down all the rest.

He read the critical notices of all the art-exhibitions. Lavish praise for this man, a kindly word of encouragement for that man, for another counsel ; but for him nothing. The year which was to have brought him triumph had brought him only defeat, and defeat of the most shameful character.

He fancied how the story of his failure would be repeated in all the art-circles ; with what cruel mockery and pitiless laughter the anecdote would be received by commonplace plodders, who had never known what it was to soar high enough for such a fall. What can seem more contemptible than the failure of Icarus or Phaëthon to the minds of men who have never aspired to achieve the impossible ?

In all Laurencé Bell's dreary meditations the image of Amy Graystone had a very small part. Standing by her grave, he had indeed felt all the anguish of passionate grief, all the bitterness of unavailing remorse ; but once away from the spot where she was buried, and from the presence of her heart-broken father, his thoughts went back to their old channel, and the figure of Giulia d'Aspramonte arose before his mental vision—a colossal statue shutting out all other images.

He painted two charming cabinet pictures during this period. He had lost all fervid feeling for his art ; but technical skill returned to him with the improvement of his sight and the restoration of comparative tranquillity to his over-strained nerves. There was no blinding mist before his eyes now ; he was no longer dazzled by the glory of his own imaginings. He worked

in a tradesmanlike spirit, bent on earning a given sum; and he worked successfully.

Mr. Mocatti praised the two little *tableaux de genre* as he had never praised his protégé's efforts in the days when he hoped so much from the young man's future. He was enraptured by Laurence Bell's apparent tranquillity, and carried away the canvases in triumph.

"They will be the gems of one of the winter exhibitions," he said. "I see thou wert right, *mon ami*. This industry is thy best cure. The doctor tells me thou wilt be a Hercules in a few months' time, so much art thou improved already. And thou wilt go on, is it not?"

"Yes," answered Laurence, with a sigh; "I shall begin something else immediately. How much do you think those pictures will fetch?"

"I will make them give me a hundred, or a hundred and fifty, for the two."

"A hundred and fifty," mused Laurence. "Fifty for the cross upon Amy's grave; a hundred for you—not a third of the sum I owe you. Yes, I must begin something else immediately; but I am hopelessly at a loss for a subject."

"Do not worry thyself. The subject will come to thee. I am going to Paris for a few days. I have been working very hard; and I go to Paris as I take a warm bath, *pour me rafraîchir*. I will bring thee back a bundle of new plays and novels, and thou shalt find a subject in one of them."

The dealer departed; and although his presence brought very little pleasure to Laurence, the young man felt more lonely because of his absence.

To comfortable families, with croquet-playing daughters and commercially-dis-

posed papas hastening to and fro between home and the City by Metropolitan Railway, Notting-hill is no doubt a most delightful neighbourhood ; but can any locality be agreeable to a friendless young man, who wanders about alone in the gloaming, oppressed with the sense of his desolation ?

To Laurence Bell the neighbourhood of Notting-hill seemed a boundless labyrinth of terraces and squares, where the same pianos were always tinkling, and the same noisy girls in pork-pie hats playing croquet, the same dismal organs grinding, the same broughams flashing past in the twilight.

He was anxious to begin upon a fresh canvas, but could find no subject for a new picture. The two little *tableaux de genre* had been simple enough : “ Jilted ”— a pretty fair-faced girl crying over a packet of returned letters and love-tokens. “ *Sic*

transit gloria mundi!"—a girl sitting on a cliff in the sunset watching an outward-bound vessel, whose white sails glimmer afar in the crimson west; all the story told in the girl's face and attitude—half despair, half resignation. *He* is gone, and—after him the deluge. Life holds nothing more for the damsel who has loved and lost him.

For a few days Laurence occupied himself with the endeavour to find a new subject. He made two or three crayon sketches, and tore them to pieces in disgust; then a dull apathy succeeded his patient industry. He could work no more. Life seemed too blank, too empty for endurance. He sat for hours in dreary idleness, thinking of the past, abandoning himself altogether to these visions, which were more real to him than his barren existence.

The end of this was not distant. There came an hour in which he could bear this

dull blank life no longer. He put on his hat, and went out of the house. He scarcely knew whether it was of his own volition that he went into the Park, and took the path which led Fulham-wards. It was Tuesday evening, the night on which Madame d'Aspramonte was wont to receive her friends. The dusky shadows were gathering beneath the old trees in the Park and Gardens. There was a subdued hush in the old court suburb. The latest of the nursery-maids wheeled their perambulators homewards wearily, or loitered in the dusky walks to hear the soft beguiling murmurs of big red-jacketed guardsmen, to the possible peril of their peace of mind in the future, and to the imminent danger of their deposit account in the Post-office savings-bank in the present.

Laurence walked through the Park in supreme unconsciousness of the loitering

nursemaids and military adventurers ; the shrill common children gambolling on the dusty sward, pleased to have the Park to themselves now that the strange race of prosperous men and women, from whom these vagrants were as far apart as if they had been Cherokees or eaters of earth in Nicaragua, had gone home to dinner ; the clamorous bathers splashing in the waters of the Serpentine. He was like a man in a dream. What, indeed, had his life been of late but a dream ? Isolated from his fellow-men, absorbed by the master passion which possessed his mind, he had no part in the outer world or the doings of its denizens. The habit of introspection had grown upon him. His life was one long reverie, one enduring agony of passion and pain—a kind of quietism, in which the image of a woman took the place of God.

What was his purpose in going to

Madame d'Aspramonte's house to-night? He had no purpose. His going was governed by no settled plan of action. He went in obedience to a blind impulse—an impulse which he had no power to combat.

The weeks in which he had worked in his Notting-hill lodging, knowing that Giulia d'Aspramonte's dwelling was within his reach, and yet holding himself aloof from her, had been one long martyrdom: and now there had come a time when nature revolted against the agony of this martyrdom. The passionate heart burst its fetters, and leaped forth with the force of despair. He felt like the model criminal, whose pious ardour and irreproachable conduct is a marvel to his pastors and governors, and who gets up one morning possessed by a demon and kills his jailer.

“Am I a slave,” he asked himself, “that I cannot even choose my own mode of de-

struction? Must my life rot inch by inch in these dreary rooms—to please Mr. Mocatti? No; I will see that woman once more before I die.”

To see her—that was all he thought of; not to cast himself at her feet once more, as in the old days when they had talked of Tasso and Leonora, of Chastelard and Mary—in the sweet days when he had fancied himself beloved. It was no such dream as this which possessed him to-night. He languished to see her, to reproach, to insult her. Was not this passion that raged in his breast hatred—stern, fierce, uncontrollable—rather than love? Could he do otherwise than hate the woman who had tempted him to his dishonour by her false wiles, and then trampled his hopes beneath her feet?

Lights were shining in all the windows of the villa when this wretched wayfarer beheld it. The mansion stood in an isolated

position, amidst a little tract of wild country betwixt road and river, and one seemed to leave the world in approaching it. Ah, what a paradise it appeared to the eyes of Laurence Bell to-night! and how the memory of his first coming possessed him as he went in among the cool firs and darksome evergreens that shaded the winding carriage-drive leading to the classic portico !

The day had been sultry and oppressive, and there seemed a peculiar coolness in the dark evergreens, the wide stretch of shadowy lawn, the pure whiteness of marble colonnades flashing athwart the dusk. Shame, unmitigated and bitter shame, bowed the head of the painter as he went towards that familiar portico. A man, even when least master of himself, can scarcely commit a mean or cowardly action without knowing his own baseness. Laurence Bell

had a keen sense of his ignominy. He had promised Mocatti not to come near this woman, and he was breaking his promise. Nor was this all. His coming was a treason against the dead, an outrage upon his own honour.

“What does it matter?” he asked himself. “She has robbed me of my fame, of my peace; let her take my honour also; and then there will be nothing left for her to trample under her feet except my life. She cannot take that too soon.”

SCENE THE NINTH.

SPELL-BOUND.

“ Oh, que vous êtes belle !
De quelle volupté déchirante et cruelle
Vous me noyez le cœur ! ”

MR. BELL did not present himself at the portico. There had been no *consigne* to prevent his passing the lodge-gates; but he knew not what orders against his admission the Princess might have given to her majordomo. It was too early yet for the usual evening visitors, nor would the painter's costume have allowed of his passing in unobserved amongst the other guests of the Princess. He knew how to find an easier entrance to the villa. The doors and win-

dows were almost all open on this sultry evening, and he went round the house to a door opening into the orangery—that wide mosaic-paved alley of foliage which formed a passage between the music-room and the villa.

The door was shut, but not locked. Laurence Bell turned the handle with a cautious touch, and went quietly into the dark grove of orange and citron, where the perfume of the blossom was almost stifling, and where the dim light of a single lamp glimmered upon the broad shining leaves.

The door of the music-room was ajar, and the room was brilliantly lighted. As the painter stopped, undecided which way to go, the clear notes of a piano sounded in that room which had once being his studio—a piano touched very softly, as if by the fingers of a dreamer.

“She is there,” thought Laurence; and

in the next moment he was on the threshold of the chamber.

Yes, she was there, seated before the grand piano, the tones whereof were as the music of the spheres, and the outer case of which was a marvel of inlaid work in ebony and mother-of-pearl. She was there, dressed in dead-white silk, which fell from her firm round waist in massive folds, like the marble drapery of a statue. Her toilette had its usual air of carelessness; a shawl of heavy black lace covered one white shoulder, and intensified the whiteness of the other; a bouquet of full-blown crimson roses looked dark against the pure white bust, and flowers of the same rich crimson glowed amongst the loose tresses of her hair.

A complete transformation had been effected in the aspect of the room since Laurence Bell had looked upon it on that

bitter day of defeat, which seemed to him to have been the end of his existence. That which had followed had been a kind of purgatory.

Upholsterers and decorators had achieved wonders in a few weeks. They were all represented, the fair mythic forms of which the painter had so vainly dreamed. Orpheus touched his enchanted lyre in one delicate medallion, Amphion attended his flock in another. On one side Arion gaily skimmed the waves of the Ionian sea on his spell-bound dolphin; on the other lost Proserpine's siren companions made music for the destruction of mankind. Here Pan played on his rustic pipe; there puffy-cheeked Tritons sounded the trumpet-tones of their sea-shells. Lyre and lute, pipe and dulcimer, in unburnished gold, stood out in high relief against panels of softest cream-colour. The silken hangings were of a pale gray



tint, the very colour of a sunless sea where it melts into the horizon; the sofas and fauteuils were pure Louis Seize; the candelabra old Venetian glass. Nothing could be more airy and lightsome than the effect of the room. No glaring colour offended the eye; and great masses of ferns, disposed artistically in every available spot, gave a felicitous air of coolness to the apartment.

These are the things which sway the weak souls of artists. Imagine the difference between Madame d'Aspramonte sitting amidst a grove of ferns against a background of gray silk drapery, and the same woman walking in Tottenham-court-road on a wet day, with mud-bedraggled petticoats, and a temper soured by vain efforts to obtain a seat in a twopenny omnibus. Imagine Calypso banished from her tranquil isle and jostled in the highways of

Athens; imagine Lady Fitz-Orpheus reft from Raspberry Vale. Who shall say how much of her subtle charm Beauty owes to her surroundings? Take the Sleeping Beauty from the silent heart of the woodland, and she is only a commonplace creature. Deprive Venus Anadyomene of her shells and sea-water, and send her to Cold-bath-fields to have her hair cropped by the prison barber, and what remains of the goddess except a good-looking young woman with a straight nose and a clear complexion?

Upon the senses of Laurence Bell the intoxication that lurks in all lovely things stole like the fumes of charcoal on the dreaming suicide. A few minutes before, out in the cool night-air, he had told himself that he was mean and base, and had loathed himself because of his infamy; now he was conscious of nothing except

a passionate admiration for this woman's beauty.

She looked up from her piano as he closed the door and recognised him ; but neither by look nor gesture did she express surprise. If he had been an expected guest, she could not have received him more quietly. There was even a languid dreamy smile upon her lips as she looked at him.

"Ah, Mr. Bell," she said softly, "it is long since I have seen you. I began to fear you must be ill."

"Since when did you begin to fear, madame?" asked the painter in his hoarse hollow-sounding voice. "Yes, I have been ill."

"And you feel yourself restored? I am very glad. I was really sorry for that *contretemps* of the other day. You must forgive me if I laughed a little ; it was pre-

cisely one of those things at which one is compelled to laugh."

"Yes, it was a fitting subject for laughter," replied Laurence, with the awful calmness of a desperate man. "I ought to laugh myself, no doubt; but I think I have lost the habit of laughing. I have been standing by a new-made grave since I last saw you, Madame d'Aspramonte."

"Indeed! I am very sorry. You have come to lose one of your parents—one of your relations?"

"No, madame. I lost my parents long ago. The grave by which I stood was that of Amy Graystone, the faithful, loving angel who was to have been my wife—the woman whom I deserted when I first learnt the fatal habit of haunting this house."

"And you come here to-night to reproach me with your breach of faith to this poor young lady, *par exemple*? That

is a little too much. Am I to be blamed if I do my best to make my house agreeable for my friends ?”

“ Agreeable ! Yes, as those sirens yonder made the melody of their lips agreeable to the mariners of the Ionian sea.”

“ You will be so good as to spare me any further allusion to that kind of people. I suppose a comparison of that sort is a species of compliment ; but it is a compliment of which one is apt to become weary. I do not affect to be either siren or enchantress. I am only a woman, anxious to live my own life, and with no desire to inflict wrong on anyone.”

She let her hands fall softly on the keys, and in sheer absence of mind, as it seemed, began to play a melody which was the very essence of suppressed passion—the musical complaining of a soul in pain.

As she played she fixed her eyes upon Laurence with a look in which pride was no longer predominant.

He came closer to the piano, and leant over it to speak to her. He seized the rounded wrist that drooped so languidly above the keys and held it as in a vice.

“Giulia,” he said—and this was the first time he had addressed her by her Christian name, though there had been few of his dreams in which that name had not been upon his lips—“Giulia, forgive me if I upbraid you. I know that I have no right to speak to you like this—absolutely no right. You did not ask for the surrender of my soul. It was not at your bidding that I laid my manhood and my honour in the dust, to be walked over by your reckless feet; they had no right to be there in the way of your footsteps. You have done me no wrong. Your name,

for me, is Fatality. What can I do but bow my head and confess your power? Shall I blame you if your chief attribute is to destroy? Ah, no, my fair Medusa; it is not your fault that it is death to look upon you. I do not reproach you; I will never reproach you again. I came here to-night to see you once more—only to see you. Ah, do not refuse me some few moments, of ecstasy! The hand of death is on me, and the desperate serenity that comes before the end of all things. Neither my love nor my hate will have power much longer. O, let me tell you how I love you; let me tell you that which my lips thirsted to utter in those dear dreamy days when I sat by your side in this room, in the long idle summer mornings when my pencil lay loose in my listless hand, and I drank the draught which I believed to be inspiration from your eyes. O queen, enchantress,

divinity, pity and pardon me, and let me utter all the passion of this heart which beats so wildly in the last tempest that can ever shake it."

The Princess looked at Laurence Bell with a glance in which there was some touch of alarm. There was something in the appearance of the painter which was not uncalculated to inspire terror. His face was deadly pale; his eyes blazed with the light of fever—or it might be madness. It was this which Madame d'Aspramonte feared—madness—that demon-spirit in semblance of mortal flesh by whose agency such horrible deeds have been done ever since the world began. The widow of Benjamin d'Aspramonte was no classic matron with a soul above fear. She had that grand proud bearing which has the aspect of courage, but she was very much afraid of anything that could assail or annoy her, nevertheless.

To-night she fancied her position not without peril. She was alone, in an apartment completely isolated from the rest of the house, and at an hour in which she was not likely to be approached by any chance visitor.

It is true that the ringing of a bell would have brought immediate succour to Madame d'Aspramonte had she felt herself in any danger from a maniac's fury ; but in these cases the ringing of a bell is generally attended with considerable difficulty. The madman's eyes are fixed on the eyes of his victim, his gripe is on the victim's arm, his knife uplifted to strike, or his pistol loaded and primed for bloodshed ; and were there a thousand bells close at hand, the doomed wretch in that fatal grasp would be powerless to set one of them ringing.

There was a tiny watch let in amongst

the inlaid work above the keyboard — a watch that timed the performance of traditional quartette by Beethoven, or break-neck fantasia by Thalberg. Madame d'Aspramonte glanced at the diminutive dial. It was but just upon the stroke of ten, and few of the lady's guests were wont to appear before eleven. There was an hour during which she must listen calmly to the wild apostrophising of a lunatic, who might at any moment snatch a knife from his pocket and stab her to the heart.

But in this hour of extremity the guile of the serpent still remained, and she knew how to extricate herself from the claws of the lion.

"Let us talk of these things calmly if we can, Laurence," she said, using the young man's Christian name as a kind of spell whereby his agitated spirits might be soothed into rest. "You cannot suppose

that I am indifferent to the worth of such intense feeling as you have evinced for me. I am not indifferent. I know full well how precious all true affection is, and how rare. Unhappily it is precisely one of those precious things that such a woman as I dare not take to her heart and cherish. To-day it is an angel of love, supernal, divine; to-morrow it may become a demon of discord. Do you begin to understand me, Laurence Bell? I am too old to accept such devotion as you have offered me. If I have seemed to trifle with you a little, it has been because I was sorely tempted. Your love has been very sweet to me—only too sweet. But I am ten years too old to dare abandon myself to so sweet a dream.”

“Too old! Ah, no! a thousand times no, Giulia!”

The Princess shook her head sadly.

"I have thirty years *bien sonnées*," she said, looking at her lover with a smile of ineffable candour, and wondering whether this statement would be too much for his credulity. "Do you think that I am a woman who dare accept the love of a man of two-and-twenty? No, dear friend; let us be wise. For you and me there is nothing but friendship possible upon this earth. In Heaven perhaps the spirits of those who think and feel as we do are permitted to hold seraphic companionship, and the old pagan fable of the divided souls which find each other and reunite after many weary years of wandering may be realised for us."

It was long since Laurence Bell had heard words so sweet as these from the lips of Madame d'Aspramonte. How could he resist the influence of those siren accents? She loved him! Ah, had not those lovely

lips confessed as much? She loved him; and when she had seemed coldest and most cruel, she had been doing battle with her own feelings. She loved him, but could not bring herself to trust the endurance of his passion.

In the rapture that came upon him with this thought, Laurence Bell forgot all the past. He forgot all he had suffered at this woman's hands; he forgot even that his days were numbered.

"My idol, my divinity!" he cried, releasing the wrist which he had held all this time almost crushed in his burning palm, and falling on his knees amidst those billowy white-silk draperies which surrounded the Princess. "You love me, you love me!" he exclaimed with unspeakable passion in his tremulous voice; "you have confessed as much. You love me, but you cannot trust in my fidelity. O, Giulia!

can you wrong me so much? can you doubt your own power so foolishly as to believe my love capable of change or diminution in all the years to come? If I am younger than you, what then? What are the few years between us when weighed against the glory of your beauty, the magic of your slow sweet smile? You love me; and all this time, while I have suffered the agonies of forgotten wretches in purgatory, I might have been here, here at your feet, kissing the hem of your robe, like this—telling you again and again, with sweet reiteration, how fondly, how madly I love you.”

He laid his fevered forehead against the cool smooth silk that fell in soft masses about and around him, as he knelt by Madame d’Aspramonte’s chair.

“O, my love,” he whispered softly, “these are the raptures which break the

hearts of men. It is not anguish that snaps the chord ; it is such joy as this—keener than sorrow, wilder than despair. You offer me your friendship—*your* friendship! Do you know that I came here to-night like a thief? I stole into your house like a felon, thinking your servants might have orders to shut the door in my face. Ah, Giulia, you cannot tell how little I would ask from your hands to make the joy of my life. A smile, a glance, or even less than that—the permission to be among the crowd that sees you; to sit forgotten or unknown, watching your face across a crowded room. Let me be your slave—only your slave—your dog to fetch and carry—your footman to hold the door as you go by, to carry your train when you go to your carriage.”

“*Enfant!* you shall be what you like, *pourvu que vous soyez raisonnable,*” said the

Princess, looking down at her adorer's fever-flushed face with a sweet smile.

She was wondering at his credulity; she was amused by her easy triumph. A few minutes ago, this man had been a creature to fear, and now he was at her feet—her slave, her puppet, ready to go through moral gymnastics absurd as the capers of a cardboard manikin in the hands of the showman. And he really believed—this ridiculous, unsuccessful, consumptive young painter, with cavernous cheeks, and glassy eyes, and a cough that was like a *glas funèbre*—he actually believed himself beloved by her, Giulia d'Aspramonte; her for whose hand men of position had sued in vain! The poor lad's delusion was so exquisitely comic, that the Princess would fain have laughed aloud, if it had not been necessary to take matters *au sérieux* just at present.

"*Comme c'est drôle, cet homme !*" she said to herself ; and then she murmured in a low pleading voice : "Thou wilt leave me now, *n'est-ce pas*, Laurence ? My friends will be here presently, and thou art not the least in the world in evening costume. *Et puis*, there is a wild look in thine eyes which makes me fear. Thou wilt go home and rest thyself, after all these follies of to-night."

How unspeakably sweet it was for this poor dupe to be thus *tutoyé* by the lips of his Delilah ! He rose from his knees, ready to obey with all his old submission.

"I may see you again to-morrow, Giulia ?"

"To-morrow, and all the to-morrows."

"It will not be for very long. Good-night—ah, no ; let me say *au revoir*."

He was looking down at her grand Italian face, as she sat by the piano, with

one hand always straying listlessly over the keys. For the first time in his life he set his lips upon the broad white brow which he had gazed upon in so many fitful moods of passion and pain.

“God bless you !” he cried with hoarse choking accents ; and in the next moment he was gone.

It was not often that Madame d’Aspramonte was favoured with the blessings of her admirers. They who worshipped at this lady’s shrine were apt to pay tribute in coin of quite another kind. The Princess cared very little whether they blessed her or cursed her. They amused her, and this was all she asked of mankind. She was like the Roman citizens, who demanded no more than *panem et circenses* ; only with her *panem* meant the refined *chefs-d’œuvre* of a Vatel, and *circenses* perennial novelty in the form of her amusements.

SCENE THE TENTH.

A DISMISSAL.

"Mais—elle est partie, ô Dieu !
J'ai tué mon ami, j'ai mérité le feu,
J'ai taché mon pourpoint, et l'on me congédie :
C'est la moralité de cette comédie."

THOSE were wild visions of impossible bliss which haunted the feverish slumbers of Laurence that night. Nay, was it indeed sleep which bound his eyelids ? Was it not rather a long delirium, in which pain put on the mask of joy ? He fancied himself happy, this poor deluded creature. She was restored to him, his empress, his divinity. The chains held him once more. The ponderous cannon-ball dragged once more at his heels, and he called it happiness.

To-morrow ! he was to see her to-morrow. In the brief season that yet

remained to him on this earth he was to lie at her feet, to bask in the sunshine of her smiles.

“And she will be sorry for me when I am dead,” he said to himself. “She loves me, and my shadow will come between her and her pleasures when I am gone. Ah, if I could be conscious of her thoughts in those days, what higher heaven should I desire?”

The painter was early astir in the bright summer morning. It was very long since he and peaceful slumber had parted company. Some spiteful, haggish half-sister of the god Somnus was the divinity who now kept watch and ward over his pillow. Fitful snatches of semi-consciousness, broken ever and anon by nervous starts and icy shiverings as of some vague terror; or the feverish sleeper would plunge into the nethermost depths of Erebus, to emerge thence of a sudden frozen with unspeakable

horror by the ghastly eyes of the nameless dead.

It was not only his fame and his honour which this wretched young man had sacrificed at the altar of a false goddess ; he had sacrificed his health also, and the indescribable and incalculable tortures that accompany shattered nerves were a part of the burden he had to bear.

He watched the sunrise from the window of his cheerless painting-room ; and as soon as the light served him he was standing before his easel, sketching the figure of a woman sitting at a piano. It was Madame d'Aspramonte, as he had seen her last night. He wanted to transfer to canvas that image which had haunted his fitful sleep. This was to be no laboured portrait. He had no longer any desire to attain mechanical perfection. He had some hours to dispose of before he could with any

decency intrude upon Madame d'Aspramonte, and in the work which conjured up her image he found the nearest approach to the rapture of her presence.

It was a pleasure of the senses rather than the intellect which he derived from this employment. As his brush lingered fondly upon the harmonious lines of the head, as it trifled with the loose dark hair, with all its lustrous lights and deep purple shadows, it seemed to him almost as if the proud white brow throbbled warm beneath the caressing touch of his hand, as if there were perfume and the tremulous breath of the night-wind in those raven tresses.

Alas, what had this love of his been to him more than a series of pictures; revealed to him for a moment, illumined by a phantasmagoric light; and in the next instant dying out into darkness?

He could not choose but recall some of

those pictures to-day, as the face and figure of his enchantress took form and life upon the canvas. He could remember her in the hot August sunlight sitting in a large open boat off Teddington Lock, with the water dashing and foaming in a silvery cascade behind her, and the warm shadows from the rose-coloured lining of a big white umbrella glowing on her face. He could recall the hoarse roar of the water ; the lazy dip of the rowers' oars ; the listless, fashionable talk about nothing particular ; and the sleepy light in those Italian eyes which looked across the rest of the water-party at him, as if they would have said, " We are alone amongst this frivolous crew—alone gifted with the power to feel the influence of the hour and the scene—alone, by the poetic faculty latent in both our souls."

And then there flashed before him a moonlight scene. She was standing in the

open doorway of the orangery, looking dreamily out upon the lawn, steeped in the full glory of the harvest moon. They were quite alone together, after a dinner *à trois*, which had been the next thing to a *tête-à-tête*, since the third *convive* had exercised no more restraining influence than one of the Queen's Maries might have done at a little dinner given by the Scottish Semiramis to Chastelard. Were there really no "little dinners" in those days, I wonder, and could the business of life and love-making go on without them? Nay, is not the "little dinner" of to-day only a new form of the *petit souper* of the past—the supper at which Cleopatra melted her pearls; the supper at which the Regent d'Orleans served such strange dishes; the supper from which Rizzio arose aghast to find himself face to face with death?

The thoughts of Laurence went back to

that scene in the moonlight. He could see Giulia d'Aspramonte's white dress ghost-like in the weird light; her face pale as the waxen myosotis in her hair, but beautiful to a degree that seemed almost unearthly—the Nemesis of Phidias—that Nemesis which was first intended for Venus—warmed into life.

He remembered falling on his knees at the feet of this living statue. “You are so beautiful, so beautiful!” he had cried: “let me worship you for your beauty.”

This, and no more, could the past reveal to him. He had worshipped her, and she had allowed herself to be worshipped—sometimes receiving his rhapsodies with a low silvery laugh, sometimes in pensive silence. She had given nothing; she had not even promised anything; but she had taken his whole heart, and crushed it in her shapely hand.

This, in sober earnest, was the governing principle of the lady's life—to take all and to give nothing. Not alone by her classic loveliness, but as much by reason of her nature, was she the very type of a pagan goddess; a greedy, insatiable divinity, for ever demanding human sacrifice; implacable, vindictive, taking dire vengeance in payment of the pettiest slight; ready to annihilate all the children of Niobe to avenge an askant look from their mother; demanding the heart's blood of an Iphigenia to atone for the slaughter of a dog; delighting in the death of shipwrecked mariners; or sending a sea-monster to devour an unoffending people because of a vain woman's foolish boast.

Never had Laurence Bell worked with more force and fire than to-day. He began to fancy himself inspired, so rapid was his

progress, so powerful the effect produced by his labour. When the western sunlight began to dazzle his eyes, he threw down his brush with a satisfied sigh. His picture was finished. It was no more than a sketch, but it was a sketch of which a master might have been proud.

It was dusk by the time the painter left the house. He had made a careful toilette this evening before setting out for Madame d'Aspramonte's abode. It was no longer the wild ungovernable impulse of a weary soul which led him thither in spite of his own better reason. He went as a privileged guest, elated by the success of his day's work, intoxicated by the anticipation of an evening spent at the feet of his idol.

Had she not offered him her friendship?—supreme privilege, blessed with which he might surely live and die happy. Could he

languish for more than this, when only to see her face was unspeakable joy?

He did not tramp wearily across the Park this evening. He was no longer a purposeless wanderer following the will-o'-the-wisp of his own fancy. A hansom cab carried him to Fulham at a very tolerable rate; but to the painter's impatience the horse behind which he sat that night seemed the slowest animal ever bred in earthly stable.

Even with this slowest of steeds the journey could not endure for ever. They came at last to the turning at which one left the common world behind, to approach the domain of Fancy and Giulia d'Aspramonte. The lamps at the gates flashed upon the summer darkness. Laurence Bell alighted, paid and dismissed the cabman. The gates were open. He entered the enchanted gardens and walked to the house

with the quick firm step of a visitor who believes himself expected.

The villa was wrapped in darkness. The marble pillars looked coldly white in the faint light of the stars. There was a solemnity in the quiet of the scene—a silence so grave, so deep, that one might have mistaken Madame d'Aspramonte's dwelling for some vast mausoleum, presided over by the manes of departed greatness.

The bell which Laurence rang pealed loud and shrill upon the stillness. The door was opened by a servant in plain clothes, and the majordomo emerged from one of the smaller rooms with a newspaper in his hand, as Laurence entered the atrium, where two ends of wax candle burning in one of the gigantic bronze candelabra made a dim sepulchral light.

Never before had Laurence Bell seen

the hall of Madame d'Aspramonte's house thus dimly lighted. There were no exotics in the jasper vases ; no glimpses of lamp-lit chambers seen through half-open doors ; no distant sound of music. All was cold and dark and silent.

The beating of the painter's heart quickened. His instinct told him that there was something amiss, but he waited to ask no questions. He was passing on to the corridor leading to the room in which he thought to find the Princess, when the majordomo stopped.

"*Mais, monsieur, Madame la Princesse n'y est pas,*" he cried.

"No matter ; I will wait."

"But, monsieur, Madame la Princesse has left town."

"She has left town ! When ? Where has she gone ?" gasped Laurence.

"But, monsieur, madame has started on

her usual continental tour. She travels all the years, as monsieur must be aware. Stay; there is a letter for monsieur.—Williams, that letter.”

The attendant flunkey vanished, and returned immediately with a note; a tiny three-cornered missive, which Laurence Bell tore open with shaking hands. It was of the briefest.

“My dear Mr. Bell, I have a perfect horror of anything like a scene. You have done me the honour to make several scenes of rather an alarming character, and I find myself compelled to leave the country in order to escape any repetition of these unpleasant performances.

“At the same time permit me to offer you my best wishes for your future, and every assurance of my distinguished consideration.

“GIULIA D’ASPRAMONTE.”

"Where has she gone?" asked the painter, when he had read this letter,

The majordomo shrugged his shoulders. He did not know the plan of madame's journey. He was to join her suite in Paris, and to accompany her on her tour. The first halting-place was Paris. Beyond that he could answer for nothing. Was not madame just a little capricious, and must not the course of her travels depend always more or less upon the whim of the moment?

"Who went with her?" Laurence demanded fiercely.

The majordomo shrugged his shoulders for the second time.

"But, monsieur, naturally Madame Baumgarten, the friend and companion of Madame la Princesse."

"And who else?" asked Laurence still more fiercely, for the man's manner told

him there had been someone else. "Did Herr Frolich go with the Princess?"

"What will you, monsieur?" inquired the majordomo with a deprecating air. "Herr Frolich is the nephew of Madame Baumgarten. He accompanied his aunt. He is also, as monsieur knows, the old and valued friend of my late master, Prince d'Aspramonte."

"At what hour did they go?" asked Laurence, not deigning to pay the smallest attention to the faithful steward's explanation.

"By this morning's mail from London Bridge. It was a sudden fancy on the part of Madame la Princesse. She told her maids to pack at ten o'clock last night. Her evening visitors did not leave her till two this morning; and at half-past six she breakfasted."

"Why not?" muttered Laurence: "how

should *she* be able to sleep?—What hotel does the Princess use at Paris?"

"Of late madame has honoured the Louvre by her patronage."

After this Laurence Bell left the villa. What further questions could he ask, what more information was he likely to obtain? This woman had fooled him once more—that was all. She had fooled him at the last, as she had fooled him from the first. He could fancy how she had laughed at him when she saw him deluded by her subtle artifices. He had gone to her despairing, wrathful; and she had turned his despair into rapture, his wrath to love. And now she laughed his love to scorn, and fled from England in order to escape from his justifiable wrath.

"But there shall come a time when she shall not fool me," Laurence Bell said to himself.

He went straight from Adrian's Villa to a tavern in the Fulham-road, where he called for some brandy, which he drank at the bar. This was quite a new thing for him, who was ordinarily the most abstemious of men. He took out his purse while he stood at the bar and counted its contents. There were several sovereigns in one of the pockets, and a five-pound note in another, the remains of his last loan from Mr. Mocatti.

At six o'clock next morning he was at the London-Bridge Terminus, where he took a single ticket for Paris. He travelled second-class, and arrived in the wonderful city at nightfall. It was his first visit to the world's capital of pleasure and folly. Ah, how often he had dreamt of this place; with what rapture had he pictured to himself its grandeur and its beauty; with what noble shades had he

peopled the quaint old streets, the historic palaces! He had dreamt of the Paris to which Henry the Bearnois laid siege; the Paris that was torn by the harassing conflicts of Royalists and Frondeurs; the Paris in which Henrietta Maria of England and France sat desolate in the chill winter morning at the bedside of her child, and would not let the little one rise because all obtainable money had been sent to help the king in England, and there was none left to buy fuel. This was the Paris which the painter had pictured to himself,—the Paris of Richelieu and Mazarin, Bossuet and La Vallière,—the poetic Paris of the past. He found himself in Paris the modern, amongst the glare and rattle of the boulevards, with all the busy life of the gayest city in the world surging and roaring round him like the waves of a tempestuous ocean.

The painter took no more heed of the scene which was so new to him than he might have done if the roar and rattle that sounded in his ears to-night had been the roar and rattle of familiar Fleet-street or Cheapside. He did not make at once for the Hôtel du Louvre, although that place was the destination which he had fixed for himself before starting on this journey.

He walked along the boulevards, looking at all the shops in his way, until he came to the kind of shop he wanted. It was a gunsmith's, brilliantly lighted, and with a noble display of arms in the window. Laurence Bell went into this emporium and bought a small revolver, the best of its kind that could be got for money. With this in his pocket he left the gunsmith's shop, after inquiring his way to the Louvre Hôtel. He went into the lighted quadrangle, where there were

flowers blooming and dark palm-trees under the lofty glass roof, and where there was the sound of many voices. The young man went past the group of loungers assembled outside the *café*, and found his way to the *bureau*.

"Can you kindly inform me whether Madame la Princesse d'Aspramonte is staying in the hotel?" he demanded of the chief functionary.

"Yes, monsieur," replied the clerk; "madame arrived last evening. Madame occupies a suite of rooms *au premier*—the apartments occupied but lately by the Japanese Ambassador."

Mr. Bell's second question was only an inquiry as to whether he could have sleeping room in the hotel.

The clerk ran his finger along the figures in a plan that lay on his desk.

"Yes; there is a little apartment *au*

cinquième at monsieur's disposal, if that will do."

Monsieur declared that it would do admirably, and was thereupon handed over to the authorities to be passed on to the apartment in question. The ascent of the Hôtel du Louvre was for Laurence Bell as laborious a journey as the ascent of Mont Blanc might be to a traveller in the full force of health and strength. He arrived at the fifth story at last, panting, exhausted, the livid whiteness of his face rendered all the more ghastly by the red spot with which the demon Consumption marks his intended prey.

The waiter looked at him compassionately as he sank exhausted into the nearest chair.

Was there anything he could get for monsieur? he asked.

"Yes; a little brandy."

“There is one who will not long have need of any lodging above ground,” the waiter said to himself, as he departed to fetch a *carafon* of cognac for the lodger in *numéro quatre-vingts douze*.

SCENE THE ELEVENTH.

THE END OF ALL THINGS.

" Crains mon amour—il est immense
Comme la mer ! Ma fosse est ouverte ; mais pense
Que je viendrai d'abord par le dos t'y pousser.

* * * * *

Le front des taureaux en furie
Dans un cirque n'a pas la cinquième partie
De la force que Dieu met aux mains des mourants."

" L'amour et la vengeance, chassant de compagnie, n'auront
jamais le dessous."

MADAME D'ASPRAMONTE'S journey had been the result of a sudden impulse. In leaving Adrian's Villa for the Continent the Princess had yielded to a feeling of uncontrollable fear. This grand Juno-like creature was the veriest craven where her own prosperity or her own safety was at stake. As she feared commercial disaster,

so she feared the possibility of peril to the precious life beyond which she saw only dark unknown horizons—blank darkness, which might shroud unutterable terrors, or only the dull dead horror of annihilation.

There had been that in Laurence Bell's aspect and manner so near akin to madness, that it is scarcely strange Madame d'Aspramonte should have feared him. She was not accustomed to this kind of thing. She had kindled a fire the flames whereof threatened to devour her, and she was fain to escape from this consuming element.

"He will come to me again," she said to herself, "and another time it may not be so easy to tranquillise him. Those burning eyes of his seemed to threaten me. The pressure of his hand upon my wrist was like the grip of death."

Possessed by this terror, the Princess determined to place herself beyond the

reach of Laurence Bell. She made her arrangements for leaving England without the loss of an hour.

“I am tired of London, my good Baumgarten,” she said to her elderly drudge and victim; “and thou, dost thou not languish to behold thy native Germany, where thou didst live so pleasantly on a thousand florins a year? We will start for Paris by to-morrow morning’s mail,—nay, this morning, since it is already midnight; thence to the Rhine, and on to Vienna; and after, perhaps, to Rome. Will you go with us, Frolich?”

The professor had already made his plans for an autumnal tour, and was very glad to escort the Princess. He had his designs with regard to this lady,—designs carefully weighed long ago,—and he looked forward to their speedy realisation. Since the death of Benjamin d’Aspramonte the

Austrian's counsel had been a necessity to the Princess; and that counsel only became so much the more necessary to her now that unlucky speculations had inspired her with the apprehension of commercial disaster.

Madame d'Aspramonte sank into her Louis-Quatorze fauteuil at the Hôtel du Louvre with a sense of relief. She had escaped from the mad adorer whose violence she had learned to fear.

"I think I have played that young man a pretty little turn," she said to herself, as she reposed after the fatigue of her journey, and dreamily contemplated the labours of Madame Baumgarten and Mademoiselle Félicité, as they moved to and fro arranging the elaborate paraphernalia of dressing-cases and perfume-caskets, portfolios and envelope-boxes, monogram-embazoned hair-brushes, fantastic Turkish

slippers, and elaborate Valenciennes-bedded *peignoirs*, which seemed necessary to the existence of Giulia d'Aspramonte, however brief her abiding in any habitation.

She had put herself beyond the reach of Mr. Bell ;—that was the dominant idea in the mind of Madame d'Aspramonte, as she abandoned herself to an agreeable drowsiness, while the waiters moved noiselessly about the adjoining apartment. They were employed in preparing the table for the *recherché* little nine-o'clock dinner, the *menu* whereof had been the subject of profound study on the part of Herr Frolich, who charged himself with all such arrangements for the fair traveller in his escort.

It is strange how, in the supreme crises of life, the ignorant wayfarer is apt to prefer the wrong road. What an awful fatality must that have been which led Mary Stuart

to England after the battle of Langside! She was at Dundrenan Abbey; the English border was very near, but the French coast was attainable — those shores of sunny France, on which she had looked with such tearful eyes as the vessel bore her away from that loved land. And now the moment had come in which she had the option of seeking refuge in that dear familiar country, amongst the kindred of whose friendship she was secure, or of flying to a strange land to throw herself on the mercy of a kinswoman who at the best had been cold and stern of phrase to this lovely dangerous cousin. Would it not have seemed natural that every instinct of this fallen queen's heart would cry aloud for a return to the unforgotten land of her bright youth? And yet it is not so. By a strange contradiction she elects to go to England. She writes to Elizabeth, asking the royal lady's

guarantee for her liberty and safe-keeping in the sisterland. No reply comes to this demand. The gravest and trustiest advisers entreat the queen to seek refuge in France, or even to remain in Scotland, where for the moment she is in safety; but the hand of Nemesis is upon the false and frail accomplice of Bothwell. She rejects all advice; crosses the gulf of Solway in a fisherman's boat; disembarks upon the coast of Cumberland, on that inhospitable English soil to find a prison and a scaffold.

For three days and nights the Princess and her suite sojourned at the Hôtel du Louvre. Madame d'Aspramonte had intended to remain only one night in Paris. She was eager to continue her journey—eager to place a wider distance between herself and the man she feared; but her intention was overruled by Herr Frolich,

who had business to transact in the great city, and who laughed to scorn madame's nervous terror of Laurence Bell.

“Granting even that this young man is mad,” he said, “what then? Are madmen allowed to have their own way in the world? or can Mr. Bell annoy or assail you when you are seated in your own apartments, or going to your carriage on my arm? What foolish fancy has taken possession of your brain? You wrap yourself up in cotton-wool until you cannot endure a breath of air; you are so accustomed to hear only soft words, that because this young painter is a little angry and hot-headed, you fancy he will do you some violence. It is all folly, madame—the folly of a child who is frightened of a shadow.”

For three days and nights the Princess stayed in the hotel; and during the greater part of those three days and nights Laurence

Bell hung about her presence like a shadow. Surely that undefined fear which possessed her in this period must have been the magnetic influence of his presence, rather than any terror developed out of her own consciousness. He was near her : some subtle faculty of the mind told her that there was danger at hand.

Of all places calculated to favour the movements of a stealthy watcher there is perhaps none better than the Hôtel du Louvre. The bustle, the crowd perpetually passing and repassing upon the wide staircases and in the quadrangle, the extent of the long passages, the number of the servants,—all combine to render it easy for a man to hang about this place unnoticed and unsuspected. Any one who did take the trouble to look at Laurence Bell as he loitered now in the reading-room, anon under the archway leading into the Rue

Rivoli, now on one flight of stairs, now on another, thought of him only as an idle young traveller at a loss how to kill time in a strange city.

For two hours in the early morning of each of those three days the painter absented himself from the hotel. He went on each of these occasions to a shooting-gallery on the other side of the Seine, whither he had been directed by one of the waiters, and amused himself in shooting at a mark. At first he showed himself the most unskilled of marksmen, but on the third morning the proprietor of the *salle d'armes* pronounced him very much improved.

"In a week's time you will be fit to meet your friend in the Bois de Vincennes," said the proprietor, laughing.

On this third morning Laurence Bell passed Antonio Mocatti in the street. He looked sadly at the face of the man who had

been both his enemy and his friend ; but the dealer did not happen to see his protégé in the crowded thoroughfare, and the two men passed without recognition.

“I am sorry he should be such a loser by me,” the painter thought, as he walked on after that chance meeting.

The Princess spent her third and last evening in Paris at Les Italiens. The opera was the *Ballo in Maschiera*. The house was crowded by a brilliant audience, and the reigning favourites of the Parisian world were in the programme. It was an extra night, after the expiration of the regular season, and the opera was played with all the splendour of an exceptional occasion.

Madame d'Aspramonte was in high spirits. Her arrangements were all made for starting on the journey to Vienna at daybreak the next morning. Herr Frolich

was in attendance, friendly and faithful, but not adoring, and entertained the Princess with agreeable gossip during the intervals between the acts. In one of these pauses the Princess and her companion discussed the theory of assassination, while Madame Baumgarten dozed behind the shelter of her fan.

“It was strange that Gustavus should be murdered in the opera-house which he built for his people,” said Madame d’Aspramonte. “I have often wondered how it is that assassination in the midst of a crowd can be so easy. I can imagine a man walking into one’s room and killing one, as Sand killed Kotzebue; but in a ballroom, or by broad daylight in a crowded street, one would fancy it impossible. It is so odd that no one sees the intention of the assassin before he can execute it.”

“Would-be assassins have been balked

of their prey," answered Herr Frolich coolly; "but as a rule they are too rapid for the lookers-on to come between them and their work. A man's mind must undergo a species of sublimation before he can nerve himself for the commission of a great crime, and his intellect is in a more exalted state than that of the common herd about him. He knows how to wait and watch for his opportunity, and how to seize it when it comes. And then, after all, the taking of a man's life is such a small business. It is but the pulling of a little morsel of iron,—so, and the thing is done, provided the brains of the victim are covered by the nozzle of the pistol."

"Yes, it is very easy," the Princess answered with a shudder, as the curtain rose.

The following intelligence appeared next morning in all the Parisian journals :

“A crime of an unprecedented character was last night committed by a person who has until this moment eluded the police. Madame la Princesse d’Aspramonte was shot through the head a few minutes before midnight, while leaving the Italian Opera-house, leaning on the arm of a friend.

“The crowd about the doors of the theatre was considerable, and the assassin contrived to escape the observation of the bystanders. Three different men were arrested on the scene of the crime ; but all three have been set at liberty, there being no sufficient evidence to connect them with the fatal act.

“The unfortunate lady was carried to a house adjoining the theatre, where medical attendance was almost immediately obtained. Unhappily death had been instantaneous. A small revolver—undoubt-

edly the weapon with which the crime was committed—was found in the roadway shortly after the murder.

“Madame d’Aspramonte was the widow of Prince Benjamin d’Aspramonte, the late chief of a distinguished banking-house in Rome, and, although of Jewish extraction, one of the firmest supporters of the papal authority.”

Mr. Mocatti found this account in his morning paper as he loitered over his breakfast in an aristocratic hotel near the Rue de la Paix. He turned very pale as he read this official statement of the end that had come to Giulia d’Aspramonte.

“Who has done it?” he asked himself. “No doubt there are many who have reason to hate her; but is there anyone wild enough or mad enough to do this—except—”

And then, after a pause, the dealer shook his head.

“No, it cannot be. I left him hard at work, cured of his folly.”

For that day, and for a week after that day, Paris occupied itself with the fate of the Princess d'Aspramonte. The police were indefatigable; but even the sagacity of a Parisian police was unavailing on this occasion. The assassin had contrived to make off unobserved in the confusion that followed his crime; and having once escaped from the scene of the assassination, there was nothing to connect him with the deed.

Mr. Mocatti waited for a week to watch the issue of events. There was a splendid funeral—a hearse of unusual magnificence followed by a long train of carriages filled with the most distinguished people in Paris. But—alas for the unlamented dead!—the people who occupied those carriages went



to Madame d'Aspramonte's funeral only as they would have gone to any other show; and did not even pay the murdered lady the poor compliment of hypocrisy—they did not even pretend to lament her fate.

She was buried at Père la Chaise; and, of all who crowded round her grave, there was only one person who regretted her death. That person was Herr Frolich, whose plans had been completely overthrown by the catastrophe that had so abruptly concluded the career of his Princess.

Madame d'Aspramonte had made no will. Her wealth went amongst a herd of low-born Neapolitan kindred, who squabbled and fought for the lady's heritage, and hated one another for ever afterwards by reason of her thousands.

After the funeral, Mr. Mocatti went back to England sorely puzzled and very disquiet of mind. He made for Notting-hill, and

found Laurence Bell at work in his painting-room. But before going upstairs to this room, Mr. Mocatti made a few inquiries of the slip-shod servant who waited on the chemist and his lodgers. This young woman told Mr. Mocatti when Mr. Bell had left Notting-hill, and how and when he had returned; and from that moment the Neapolitan had no doubt as to the hand which had slain Giulia d'Aspramonte.

The painter looked up with a strange smile as his patron entered the room.

"I came back to finish my work," he said. "You shall not lose by me, after all, Mocatti."

"You have been to Paris."

"How do you know that?"

"I know something more than that, Laurence Bell," answered Mr. Mocatti solemnly; "I know what you have done there."

“Do you think I should shrink from doing the same thing, if it were to be done again?” cried the painter, with a wild look in his haggard eyes. “There is an end of her sorceries. She will break no more hearts. O, Mocatti, you do not know how she fooled me and deluded me to the very last. Do not look at me with that horrified countenance. You must know that it is so much the better for the world that Giulia d’Aspramonte is dead. I came back here to my work; and I shall work on quietly till I die. You will think me the hardest and worst of men, no doubt, if I tell you that I do not repent. But it is the truth. I am sorry that I was false to Amy Graystone; I am sorry for my wasted life; but I am not sorry for what I did in Paris a week ago.”

Within ten days of Mr. Mocatti’s return

his protégé's troubled life came to a quiet close. The demon Consumption tightened his grip now that passion no longer gave the victim strength to fight that direful foe. Laurence Bell died in Mr. Mocatti's arms. He made no sign of repentance ; and upon this earth there was no one wise enough to know how far he had been master of himself during the last few months of his brief wasted life.

Mr. Mocatti was slow to forget the protégé from whose genius he had hoped such great things. He sold Laurence Bell's last sketches for very high prices ; for some part of the young man's story had got abroad, and the secret of Madame d'Aspramonte's death was pretty generally suspected by the habitués of Adrian's Villa. The dealer shed tears as he parted with those last sketches, and suffered real remorse for his own part in Laurence Bell's destiny.

“He might have done so well, if I had let him alone,” he said to himself. “He might have lived to be a great man, if I had let him plod on in his own way, and marry *cette jeunesse*.”

Adrian’s Villa has been sold by order of the High Court of Chancery, and purchased for an enormous sum by a successful stockjobber, who has put a billiard-table in Madame d’Aspramonte’s music-room, and allows his City friends to poison the tropical plants in the orangery with the fumes of their regalias.

A pure white marble cross marks the spot where Amy Graystone lies; and not far from that simple monument there is a granite slab which bears the name of LAURENCE BELL.

Is there any moral to this story? To the mind of the writer, yes! Is not the history of Laurence Bell a protest against the worship of the sensuous in Art? As Helen is supposed by some critics to be the type of ideal beauty, pure, unchangeable, deathless, and undefiled; so may Giulia d'Aspramonte be taken as the type of sensuous loveliness, enervating, fatal, deadly. Unhappily, all the tendencies of the present age lean to the indulgence in a passion for sensuous beauty. In the unbridled luxury of modern life, in the extravagance of modern costume, in the painted face and artificial *chevelure* of modern beauty, one perceives the same influence.

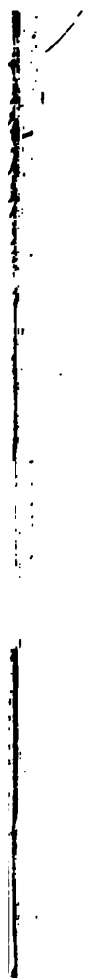
“And why not?” cries the kindly optimist; “the age has become artistic, and this love of splendour and colour is no doubt inseparable from the love of Art.”

Ah, surely not ! Surely in the religion of Art there is a higher and purer form of worship than that which begins and ends at the feet of earthly beauty.

THE END.

LONDON :

ROBSON AND SON, GREAT NORTHERN PRINTING WORKS,
FANCRAE ROAD, N.W.





8000584061

